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FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

ACTIONS NEEDED TO IMPROVE HOW AGENCIES MANAGE STRUCTURES

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government's real property portfolio includes land, buildings, and structures. GAO has designated the management of federal real property as high-risk based largely on the management of federal buildings. However, over half of the assets are structures, such as roads, dams, and radio towers. GAO was asked to examine management issues related to structures. This report examines (1) the scale and scope of federally owned or leased structures, (2) how federal agencies track and categorize federal structures, and (3) the extent to which the challenges federal agencies face in managing buildings also apply to structures. GAO analyzed FRPP data on structures managed by federal civilian agencies against federal internal control standards for executive branch agencies and OMB guidelines, visited 24 sites selected to represent a variety of structure types from five civilian federal agencies with high numbers of structures, and interviewed officials from the five agencies, OMB and GSA about FRPP data collection and how agencies manage their structures.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OMB, in coordination with the FRPC, develop guidance to improve agencies internal controls to produce consistent, accurate and reliable information on their structures. GSA, in coordination with the FRPC, should clarify the definition of structures and assess the feasibility of limiting the data collected on structures submitted to the FRPP. OMB and GSA agreed with the recommendations, and GSA provided an action plan to implement GAO's recommendations.

View GAO-14-87. For more information, contact David Wise at (202) 512-2834 or wised@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

In 2012, federal agencies reported to the Federal Real Property Council (FRPC)—an organization comprised of all real property holding federal agencies—that they are responsible for operating over 480,000 federally owned structures. Information about these structures is recorded in the FRPC's Federal Real Property Profile (FRPP), the government's comprehensive database that describes the nature, use, and extent of federal real property. About 176,000 of those structures are operated by civilian federal agencies. The federal government manages a wide variety of structures. Some of these are common across agencies, such as roads and parking structures, while some are more specific to agencies' missions, such as historic structures or particle accelerators.

Agencies take different approaches to defining and inventorying structures making the aggregation of data in the FRPP's database unreliable. Agencies we reviewed defined structures differently leading to inconsistencies in what assets are included in the FRPP, including counting some building-like facilities as structures. We also found that these agencies counted structures differently, provided inaccurate structure location information, and categorized their structures inconsistently, all of which limits the usefulness of the data on structures in the FRPP. Additionally, the agencies we reviewed submitted incorrect information for key data elements, such as the replacement value, annual operating costs, and condition. GSA officials who manage the FRPP said that FRPC chose to provide flexibility in the reporting guidance for data on structures to account for the wide diversity in federal structures, but it also aggregates the data as if they were comparable. Even if this data were useful, FRPC reports very little information on structures, and officials at GSA told us that there is low interest in and demand for this information, creating few incentives to improve data reliability. In prior reports, we have stressed the importance of limiting the number of elements to the vital few that are considered essential for producing data for decision making in light of the costs in collecting this data.

Agencies generally face similar challenges in managing structures as they do in managing buildings. Officials from all of the selected agencies stated that most challenges centered on prioritizing resources to maintain structures, disposing of excess structures, and ensuring their safety and security.

Examples of Structures Owned by the Federal Government

Source: GAO.

The tugboat Hercules in Interior's San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park in California, Interior's Parker Dam between Arizona and California, and a fence line in DOE's Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory Site 300 in California