

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-709](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Levees, which are man-made structures such as earthen embankments or concrete floodwalls, play a vital role in reducing the risk of flooding. Their failure can contribute to loss of lives or property, as shown by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. It is estimated that there are over 100,000 miles of levees across the United States, many of which are owned or operated by nonfederal entities. The Corps and FEMA are the two principal federal agencies with authorities related to levee safety.

The Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014 requires the Corps and FEMA to take the lead on certain national levee-safety-related activities including developing a national levee inventory, which Congress authorized in 2007. The act also includes a provision for GAO to report on related issues. This report examines the Corps' and FEMA's progress in carrying out key national activities related to levee safety required in the act. GAO reviewed pertinent federal laws and executive orders as well as budget, planning, and policy documents from the Corps and FEMA; compared agency activities with federal internal control standards; and interviewed Corps and FEMA headquarters officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Corps and FEMA develop a plan that includes milestones for implementing the required national levee-safety-related activities using existing resources or requesting additional resources as needed. The agencies generally concurred with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-16-709](#). For more information, contact Anne-Marie Fennell at (202) 512-3841 or fennella@gao.gov

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LEVEE SAFETY

Army Corps and FEMA Have Made Little Progress in Carrying Out Required Activities

What GAO Found

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) have made little progress in implementing key national levee-safety-related activities required in the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014. More specifically, the Corps has been working to develop a national levee inventory, but the agencies have taken no action on the remaining key national levee-safety-related activities for which they are responsible under the act, as shown in the table below. Agency officials identified resource constraints as a primary reason for their lack of progress in implementing such activities, and Corps officials said that not implementing these activities could potentially result in safety risks and federal financial risks for disaster relief, among other impacts. However, the agencies have no plan for implementing the remaining activities required by the act. Without a plan that includes milestones for accomplishing these activities using existing resources or requesting additional resources as needed, the agencies are unlikely to make progress implementing the activities under the act.

Implementation Status, as of June 2016, of Key National Levee-Safety-Related Activities in the Water Resources Reform and Development Act of 2014

Activity	Implementation status	Statutory deadline	Agency responsible
Reconvene the national committee on levee safety	No action	None	Corps
Continue to develop national levee inventory	Ongoing	None	Corps
Implement multifaceted levee safety initiative	No action	Several	Corps and FEMA
Submit a report on the state of U.S. levees, the effectiveness of the levee safety initiative, and any necessary congressional actions	No action	June 10, 2015 and biennially thereafter	Corps
Submit a report including recommendations on advisability and feasibility of a joint dam and levee-safety program	No action	June 10, 2017	Corps and FEMA
Submit a report including recommendations that identify and address legal liabilities of engineering levee projects	No action	June 10, 2015	Corps

Source: GAO analysis of Corps and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) information. | GAO-16-709