



Highlights of [GAO-06-1096T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Among other things, the Office of National Capital Region Coordination is to coordinate efforts within the National Capital Region (NCR) to ensure execution of domestic preparedness activities. In our May 2004 report and June 2004 testimony before the House Government Reform Committee, GAO recommended that the NCR develop a strategic plan to establish and monitor the achievement of regional goals and priorities for emergency preparedness and response. GAO subsequently testified on the status of the NCR's strategic planning efforts before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia in July 2005 and March 2006. The Subcommittee asked GAO to provide comments on the NCR's strategic plan, which the NCR partners approved in September 2006.

In this testimony, GAO discusses its assessment of the recently completed NCR homeland security strategic plan and the extent to which the new plan includes desirable strategic plan characteristics and how the substance of the plan might be further strengthened when the plan is reviewed and possibly revised.

What GAO Recommends

GAO includes no new recommendations in this testimony.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-1096T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact William Jenkins, Jr., 202-512-8757, jenkinswo@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Assessment of the National Capital Region Strategic Plan

What GAO Found

A coordinated strategic plan to establish and monitor the achievement of regional goals and priorities is fundamental to implementing a coordinated approach to enhancing emergency preparedness and response capacities in the NCR. In March 2006, GAO observed that the NCR's strategic plan could benefit from addressing all six characteristics GAO considers to be desirable for a regional homeland security strategy. These characteristics were used to evaluate the final plan. These include, for example, goals, subordinate objectives, activities, and performance measures; resources, investments, and risk management; and organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination.

The NCR approved its strategic plan in September 2006. The NCR homeland security strategic plan includes all six characteristics we consider desirable for a regional homeland security strategy. To illustrate, the plan includes regional priorities and presents the rationale for the goals and related objectives and initiatives. This includes information on how the plan addresses national priorities and targeted capabilities from the National Preparedness Goal, an Emergency Management Accreditation Program assessment of local and regional preparedness and emergency management capabilities against recognized national standards, and DHS's Nationwide Plan Review of emergency plans. The plan structure is more streamlined, containing an overview, core plan, and detailed appendix with information on factors such as risks, costs, and roles and responsibilities.

However, the substance of the information within these six characteristics could be improved to guide decision makers. Two examples: (1) the plan does not reflect a comprehensive risk assessment for the region, which, when completed, may result in changes in some of the priorities in the current plan; and (2) although the NCR plan defines objectives as being key, measurable milestones for reaching each goal, many objectives include language such as "strengthen," "enhance," "increase," "improve," and "expand" rather than more specific performance measures and targets. Several of our observations regarding potential plan substance are the same as those we provided in our March 2006 testimony.

The NCR has made considerable progress in developing its first strategic plan. Although GAO has noted some remaining limitations and areas of potential improvement, the NCR strategic plan provides the basic foundation for regional preparedness, including what is needed in case of a catastrophic event. Now, the challenge is ensuring that initiatives to implement the goals and objectives are funded, completed, and appropriately assessed to determine if they have achieved the NCR's strategic goals while continually monitoring the plan's implementation to determine what adjustments are needed for continuing improvement.