



Highlights of [GAO-06-150](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Terrorist attacks on U.S. chemical facilities could damage public health and the economy. While the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) formerly led federal efforts to ensure chemical facility security, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is now the lead federal agency coordinating efforts to protect these facilities from terrorist attacks.

GAO reviewed (1) DHS's actions to develop a strategy to protect the chemical industry, (2) DHS's actions to assist in the industry's security efforts and coordinate with EPA, (3) industry security initiatives and challenges, and (4) DHS's authorities and whether additional legislation is needed to ensure chemical plant security. GAO interviewed DHS, EPA, and industry officials, among others.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that (1) the Congress consider giving DHS the authority to require the chemical industry to address plant security, (2) DHS complete the chemical sector-specific plan in a timely manner, and (3) DHS work with EPA to study the security benefits to plants of using safer technologies. After reviewing a draft of this report, DHS agreed in substance with GAO's first two recommendations but expressed concerns about studying safer technologies. GAO continues to see merit in such a study. EPA had no comments on the draft report.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-150.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact John Stephenson at (202) 512-3841 or stephensonj@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

DHS Is Taking Steps to Enhance Security at Chemical Facilities, but Additional Authority Is Needed

What GAO Found

As part of a national framework for protecting the chemical sector, DHS is developing a Chemical Sector-Specific Plan. The plan is intended to, among other things, describe DHS's ongoing efforts and future plans to coordinate with federal, state, and local agencies and the private sector; identify chemical facilities to include in the sector, assess their vulnerabilities, and prioritize them; and develop programs to prevent, deter, mitigate, and recover from attacks on chemical facilities. DHS did not estimate when the plan will be completed.

To date, DHS has taken a number of actions aimed at protecting the chemical sector from terrorist attacks. DHS has identified 3,400 facilities that, if attacked, could pose the greatest hazard to human life and health and has initiated programs to assist the industry and local communities in protecting chemical facilities. For example, the Buffer Zone Protection Program assists facility owners and local law enforcement with improving the security of areas surrounding plants. DHS also coordinates with the Chemical Sector Coordinating Council, an industry-led group that acts as a liaison for the chemical sector, and with EPA and other federal agencies.

The chemical industry is voluntarily addressing plant security, but faces challenges in preparing against terrorism. Some industry associations require member companies to assess plants' vulnerabilities, develop and implement plans to mitigate vulnerabilities, and have a third party verify that security measures were implemented. Other associations have developed security guidelines and other tools to encourage their members to address security. While voluntary efforts are under way, industry officials said that they face challenges in preparing facilities against terrorism, including high costs and limited guidance on how much security is adequate.

Because existing laws provide DHS with only limited authority to address security at chemical facilities, it has relied primarily on the industry's voluntary security efforts. However, the extent to which companies are addressing security is unclear. Unlike EPA, for example, which requires drinking water facilities to improve their security, DHS does not have the authority to require chemical facilities to assess their vulnerabilities and implement security measures. Therefore, DHS cannot ensure that facilities are taking these actions. DHS has stated that its existing authorities do not permit it to effectively regulate the chemical industry, and that the Congress should enact federal requirements for chemical facilities. Many stakeholders agreed—as GAO concluded in 2003—that additional legislation placing federal security requirements on chemical facilities is needed. However, stakeholders had mixed views on the contents of any legislation, such as requirements that plants substitute safer chemicals and processes that potentially could reduce the risks present at these facilities.