



Highlights of [GAO-09-676](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 1997, periodic GAO surveys indicate that overall, federal managers have more performance information available but have not made any greater use of this information for decision making. Based on GAO's most recent survey in 2007, GAO was asked to (1) identify agencies with relatively low use of performance information and the factors that contribute to this condition; and (2) examine practices in an agency with indications of improvement in use of performance information. GAO analyzed results from its surveys of federal managers across 29 agencies, reviewed key agency documents related to using performance information—such as Performance and Accountability Reports—and interviewed agency and selected subunit managers about their management practices. GAO also compared management practices, at selected agencies with those GAO has identified as promoting the use of performance information for decision making.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to the Departments of Homeland Security and the Interior for improvements to key management practices to promote greater use of performance information at FEMA, NPS, Reclamation, as well as at Interior. Interior agreed in principle and DHS generally concurred, but disagreed that FEMA should develop an interim performance management plan. GAO clarified this recommendation to address the concern.

[View GAO-09-676 or key components.](#)
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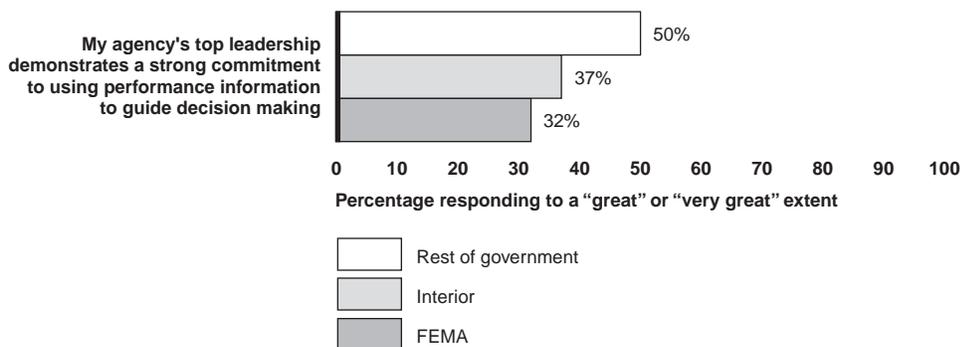
RESULTS-ORIENTED MANAGEMENT

Strengthening Key Practices at FEMA and Interior Could Promote Greater Use of Performance Information

What GAO Found

According to GAO's 2007 survey of federal managers on their use of performance information for decision making, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Department of the Interior (Interior), ranked 27 and 28 out of 29 agencies. Several factors contributed to this relatively low use. At both FEMA and Interior, the demonstrated commitment of agency leaders to using performance information—a key management practice—was inconsistent. While some FEMA programs and regions encouraged use of performance information to plan for and respond to unpredictable events, others expressed uncertainty as to how they could use performance information in the face of uncontrollable external factors. FEMA managers were also hampered by weak alignment among agency, program, and individual goals, as well as limited analytic capacity to make use of performance information. At Interior and the National Park Service (NPS), managers reported a proliferation of measures, including some that, while meaningful for department-level accountability, were not relevant to their day-to-day management. Managers at NPS and the Bureau of Reclamation also said that poorly integrated performance and management information systems contributed to an environment where the costs of performance reporting—in terms of time and resources—outweighed what they described as minimal benefits. While both FEMA and Interior have taken some promising steps to make their performance information both useful and used, these initiatives have thus far been limited.

Survey question



Source: GAO.

The experience of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) highlights the role that strengthened management practices can play. According to GAO's 2000 and 2007 survey results, the percentage of managers at CMS reporting use of performance information for various management decisions increased by nearly 21 percentage points—one of the largest improvements among agencies over that period. CMS officials attributed this change to a combination of key management practices they had employed, including, but not limited to: leadership commitment to using performance information; alignment of strategic and performance goals; improving the usefulness of performance information; and building the analytic capacity to collect and use performance information.