

Why GAO Did This Study

The United States continues to face a range of evolving threats, such as the 2010 attempted attack on the nation's air cargo system, that underscore why homeland security planning efforts are crucial to the security of the nation. The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 required the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to provide a comprehensive examination of the U.S. homeland security strategy every 4 years. In response, DHS issued its first Quadrennial Homeland Security Review (QHSR) report in February 2010 and a Bottom-Up Review (BUR) report in July 2010, to identify initiatives to implement the QHSR. As requested, this report addresses the extent to which DHS (1) consulted with stakeholders in developing the QHSR, (2) conducted a national risk assessment, and (3) developed priorities, plans, monitoring mechanisms, and performance measures for implementing the QHSR and BUR initiatives. GAO analyzed relevant statutes and DHS documents on the QHSR and BUR processes and, in response to a request for comments on the processes, received comments from 63 of the 85 federal and nonfederal stakeholders it contacted. Their responses are not generalizable, but provided perspectives on the processes.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that for future reviews, DHS provide the time needed for stakeholder consultations, explore options for consulting with nonfederal stakeholders, and examine how risk information could be considered in prioritizing QHSR initiatives. DHS concurred with our recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-11-873](#). For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or maurerd@gao.gov.

QUADRENNIAL HOMELAND SECURITY REVIEW

Enhanced Stakeholder Consultation and Use of Risk Information Could Strengthen Future Reviews

What GAO Found

DHS solicited input from various stakeholder groups in conducting the first QHSR, but DHS officials, stakeholders GAO contacted, and other reviewers of the QHSR noted concerns with time frames provided for stakeholder consultations and outreach to nonfederal stakeholders. DHS consulted with stakeholders—federal agencies; department and component officials; state, local, and tribal governments; the private sector; academics; and policy experts—through various mechanisms, such as the solicitation of papers to help frame the QHSR and a web-based discussion forum. DHS and these stakeholders identified benefits from these consultations, such as DHS receiving varied perspectives. However, stakeholders also identified challenges in the consultation process. Sixteen of 63 stakeholders who provided comments to GAO noted concerns about the time frames for providing input into the QHSR or BUR. Nine DHS stakeholders, for example, responded that the limited time available for development of the QHSR did not allow DHS to have as deep an engagement with stakeholders. Further, 9 other stakeholders commented that DHS consultations with nonfederal stakeholders, such as state, local, and private sector entities, could be enhanced by including more of these stakeholders in QHSR consultations. In addition, reports on the QHSR by the National Academy of Public Administration, which administered DHS's web-based discussion forum, and a DHS advisory committee comprised of nonfederal representatives noted that DHS could provide more time and strengthen nonfederal outreach during stakeholder consultations. By providing more time for obtaining feedback and examining mechanisms to obtain nonfederal stakeholders' input, DHS could strengthen its management of stakeholder consultations and be better positioned to review and incorporate, as appropriate, stakeholders' input during future reviews.

DHS identified threats confronting homeland security in the 2010 QHSR report, such as high-consequence weapons of mass destruction and illicit trafficking, but did not conduct a national risk assessment for the QHSR. DHS officials stated that at the time DHS conducted the QHSR, DHS did not have a well-developed methodology or the analytical resources to complete a national risk assessment that would include likelihood and consequence assessments—key elements of a national risk assessment. To develop an approach to national risk assessments, DHS created a study group as part of the QHSR process that developed a national risk assessment methodology. DHS officials plan to implement a national risk assessment in advance of the next QHSR, which DHS anticipates conducting in fiscal year 2013.

DHS developed priorities, plans, monitoring mechanisms, and performance measures, but did not consider risk information in making its prioritization efforts. DHS considered various factors in identifying high-priority BUR initiatives for implementation in fiscal year 2012 but did not include risk information as one of these factors, as called for in GAO's prior work and DHS's risk management guidance, because of differences among the initiatives that made it difficult to compare risks across them, among other things. Consideration of risk information during future implementation efforts could help strengthen DHS's prioritization of mechanisms for implementing the QHSR, including assisting in determinations of which initiatives should be implemented in the short or longer term.