



Highlights of [GAO-10-105T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

By preparing their families and property before an event, individuals can reduce a disaster's impact on them and their need for first responder assistance, particularly in the first 72 hours following a disaster. By law, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), located in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is to develop a national preparedness system (NPS)—FEMA includes community preparedness programs as part of the NPS. FEMA's budget to operate these programs made up less than one half of 1 percent of its \$7.9 billion budget for fiscal year 2009. These programs include the Citizen Corps program and its partner programs, such as Fire Corps, and rely on volunteers to coordinate efforts and assist first responders in local communities. DHS's Ready Campaign promotes preparedness through mass media. This testimony provides preliminary observations on (1) challenges FEMA faces in measuring the performance of Citizen Corps, its partner programs, and the Ready Campaign and (2) actions FEMA has taken to develop a strategy to encompass how Citizen Corps, its partner programs, and the Ready Campaign operate within the context of the NPS. This testimony is based on work conducted from February 2008 to October 2009. GAO analyzed documents, such as FEMA's strategic plan, and compared reported performance data with observations from 12 site visits, selected primarily based on the frequency of natural disasters. The results are not projectable, but provide local insights.

View [GAO-10-105T](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact William O. Jenkins, Jr., at (202) 512-8777 or [jenkinswo@gao.gov](mailto:jenkinswo@gao.gov).

## EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

### Preliminary Observations on FEMA's Community Preparedness Programs Related to the National Preparedness System

#### What GAO Found

FEMA faces challenges measuring performance for Citizen Corps, partner programs, and the Ready Campaign because it does not have a process to verify that data for its principal performance measure—the registered number of established volunteer organizations across the country—are accurate and the Ready Campaign is not positioned to control the distribution of its message or measure whether its message is changing individuals' behavior. FEMA faces challenges ensuring that the information needed to measure the number of established, active volunteer units is accurate. For example, officials representing 17 councils GAO contacted during its site visits stated that 12 were active and 5 were not. FEMA officials said that the new online registration process FEMA plans to adopt in 2010 will result in some programs being removed from FEMA's registries. They said that FEMA expects to use the new process to collect more comprehensive data on membership and council activities. FEMA counts requests for literature, Web site hits, and the number of television or radio announcements made to gauge performance for the Ready Campaign, but FEMA does not control when its message is viewed because it relies on donated media, such as air time for television and radio announcements. Because changes in behavior can result from a variety of factors, including other campaigns, it is difficult to measure the campaign's effect on changes in individuals' behavior.

FEMA's challenges measuring the performance of community preparedness programs is compounded by the fact that it has not developed a strategy to encompass how Citizen Corps, its partner programs, and the Ready Campaign are to operate within the context of the NPS. In April 2009, GAO reported that FEMA's National Preparedness Directorate (NPD), which is responsible for community preparedness, had not developed a strategic plan. GAO reported that instead of a strategic plan, NPD officials stated that they used a draft annual operating plan and Post-Katrina Act provisions to guide NPD's efforts. However, the plan's objectives do not include key elements of a strategy, such as how NPD will measure its progress meeting goals and objectives or the potential costs and types of resources and investments needed. GAO recommended that NPD develop a strategic plan to implement the NPS that contains these key elements. FEMA concurred with GAO's recommendation and told GAO that it is taking actions to strengthen strategic planning. FEMA officials stated that they are reviewing implementation plans and policy documents, such as the *National Preparedness Guidelines*, and that community preparedness is a key element being considered in this process. FEMA has not set a date for completion of the National Preparedness System strategy, and the extent to which Citizen Corps, its partner programs, or the Ready Campaign will be included in the final strategy is not clear. GAO will continue to assess FEMA's efforts related to community preparedness programs as part of its ongoing work. FEMA provided technical comments on a draft of this testimony, which GAO incorporated as appropriate.