

Why GAO Did This Study

According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), protecting and ensuring the resiliency (the ability to resist, absorb, recover from, or successfully adapt to adversity or changing conditions) of critical infrastructure and key resources (CIKR) is essential to the nation's security. By law, DHS is to lead and coordinate efforts to protect several thousand CIKR assets deemed vital to the nation's security, public health, and economy. In 2006, DHS created the National Infrastructure Protection Plan (NIPP) to outline the approach for integrating CIKR and increased its emphasis on resiliency in its 2009 update. GAO was asked to assess the extent to which DHS (1) has incorporated resiliency into the programs it uses to work with asset owners and operators and (2) is positioned to disseminate information it gathers on resiliency practices to asset owners and operators. GAO reviewed DHS documents, such as the NIPP, and interviewed DHS officials and 15 owners and operators of assets selected on the basis of geographic diversity. The results of these interviews are not generalizable but provide insights.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS develop resiliency performance measures, update Protective Security Advisor (PSA) guidelines, and determine the feasibility of developing an approach to disseminate resiliency information. DHS is taking action to implement two recommendations and is internally considering the third.

View [GAO-10-772](#) or [key components](#).
For more information, contact Stephen L. Caldwell at (202) 512-8777 or caldwells@gao.gov.

CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION

DHS Efforts to Assess and Promote Resiliency Are Evolving but Program Management Could Be Strengthened

What GAO Found

DHS's efforts to incorporate resiliency into the programs it uses to work with asset owners and operators is evolving but program management could be strengthened. Specifically, DHS is developing or updating programs to assess vulnerability and risk at CIKR facilities and within groups of related infrastructure, regions, and systems to place greater emphasis on resiliency. However, DHS has not taken commensurate efforts to measure asset owners' and operators' actions to address resiliency gaps. DHS operates its Protective Security Advisor Program, which deploys critical infrastructure protection and security specialists, called PSAs, to assist asset owners and operators on CIKR protection strategies, and has provided guidelines to PSAs on key job tasks such as how to establish relationships between asset owners and operators and DHS, federal, state, and local officials. DHS has provided training to PSAs on resiliency topics, but has not updated PSA guidelines to articulate the role of PSAs with regard to resiliency issues, or how PSAs are to promote resiliency strategies and practices to asset owners and operators. A senior DHS official described plans to update PSA guidelines and the intent to outline this plan in October 2010, but did not provide information on what changes would be made to articulate PSA roles and responsibility with regard to resiliency. By developing measures to assess the extent to which asset owners and operators are addressing resiliency gaps and updating PSA guidance, DHS would be better positioned to manage its efforts to help asset owners and operators enhance their resiliency.

DHS faces barriers disseminating information about resiliency practices across the spectrum of asset owners and operators. DHS shares information on potential protective measures with asset owners and operators and others including state and local officials (generally on a case-by-case basis) after it has completed vulnerability assessments at CIKR facilities. DHS officials told GAO that they have considered ways to disseminate information that they collect or plan to collect with regard to resiliency. However, DHS faces barriers sharing information about resiliency strategies. For example, given the voluntary nature of the CIKR partnership, DHS officials stated that DHS should not be viewed as identifying and promoting practices which could be construed by CIKR partners to be standards. Also, according to DHS officials, the need for and the emphasis on resiliency can vary across different types of facilities depending on the nature of the facility. For example, an oil refinery is inherently different than a government office building. DHS's efforts to emphasize resiliency when developing or updating the programs it uses to work with owners and operators creates an opportunity for DHS to position itself to disseminate information about resiliency practices within and across the spectrum of asset owners and operators. By determining the feasibility of overcoming barriers and developing an approach for disseminating information on resiliency practices within and across sectors, DHS could better position itself to help asset owners and operators consider and adopt resiliency strategies.