



Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Emergency Management, Intergovernmental Relations, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, U.S. Senate

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NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

FEMA Has Made Progress, but Additional Steps Are Needed to Improve Grant Management and Assess Capabilities

Statement of David C. Maurer, Director
Homeland Security and Justice

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-637T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Emergency Management, Intergovernmental Relations, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

From fiscal years 2002 through 2012, Congress appropriated about \$41 billion to a variety of DHS preparedness grant programs to enhance the capabilities of state and local governments to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks and other disasters. DHS allocated more than \$22.3 billion through four of the largest preparedness programs—the Urban Areas Security Initiative, the State Homeland Security Program, the Port Security Grant Program, and the Transit Security Grant Program.

In February 2012, GAO identified factors that contribute to the risk of FEMA potentially funding unnecessarily duplicative projects across the four grant programs. In March 2011, GAO reported that FEMA faced challenges in developing and implementing a national preparedness assessment, a fact that inhibits its abilities to effectively prioritize preparedness grant funding. This testimony updates GAO's prior work and describes FEMA's progress in (1) managing preparedness grants and (2) measuring national preparedness by assessing capabilities. This statement is based on prior products GAO issued from July 2005 to March 2013 and selected updates in June 2013. To conduct the updates, GAO analyzed agency documents, such as the *National Preparedness Reports*, and interviewed FEMA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations to DHS and FEMA in prior reports. DHS and FEMA concurred with these recommendations and have actions under way to address them.

View [GAO-13-637T](#). For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-8777 or maurerd@gao.gov.

June 25, 2013

NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS

FEMA Has Made Progress, but Additional Steps Are Needed to Improve Grant Management and Assess Capabilities

What GAO Found

Officials in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—have identified actions they believe will enhance management of the four preparedness programs GAO analyzed; however, FEMA still faces challenges. In February 2012, GAO found that FEMA lacked a process to coordinate application reviews and made award decisions with differing levels of information. To better identify potential unnecessary duplication, GAO recommended that FEMA collect project-level information and enhance internal coordination and administration of the programs. DHS concurred and has taken steps to address GAO's recommendations. For example, the fiscal year 2013 and 2014 President's budgets proposed the establishment of the National Preparedness Grant Program (NPGP), a consolidation of 16 FEMA grant programs into a single program. Members of Congress raised questions about the NPGP and did not approve the proposal for fiscal year 2013. FEMA incorporated stakeholder views, as directed by Congress, and the fiscal year 2014 President's Budget again proposed the NPGP. If approved, and depending on its final form and execution, the NPGP could help mitigate the potential for unnecessary duplication and address GAO's recommendation to improve internal coordination. In March 2013, FEMA officials reported that the agency intends to start collecting and analyzing project-level data from grantees in fiscal year 2014; but has not yet finalized data requirements or fully implemented the data system to collect the information. Collecting appropriate data and implementing project-level enhancements as planned would address GAO's recommendation and better position FEMA to identify potentially unnecessary duplication.

FEMA has made progress addressing GAO's March 2011 recommendation that it develop a national preparedness assessment with clear, objective, and quantifiable capability requirements and performance measures, but continues to face challenges in developing a national preparedness system that could assist the agency in prioritizing preparedness grant funding. For example, FEMA required state and local governments receiving homeland security funding to complete Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessments (THIRA) and, as a part of this process, develop their own capability requirements by December 31, 2012. State officials are to use the capability requirements they identified to self-assess capabilities in their future *State Preparedness Reports*, which FEMA uses along with other sources to develop the annual *National Preparedness Reports*. However, FEMA faces challenges that may reduce the usefulness of these efforts. For example, because states develop their own capability requirements, and use individual judgment rather than a quantitative standard to assess preparedness capabilities, it may be difficult to identify differences and compare capability levels across states. Further, while FEMA officials stated that the THIRA process is intended to develop a set of national capability performance requirements and measures, such requirements and measures have not yet been developed. Until FEMA develops clear, objective, and quantifiable capability requirements and performance measures, it is unclear what capability gaps currently exist and what level of federal resources will be needed to close such gaps. GAO will continue to monitor FEMA's efforts to develop capability requirements and performance measures.



Chairman Begich, Ranking Member Paul, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in today’s hearing to provide an update on federal efforts to manage preparedness grants and assess preparedness capabilities. From fiscal years 2002 through 2013, the federal government appropriated about \$41 billion to a variety of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) preparedness grant programs to enhance the capabilities of state, local, territory, and tribal governments to prevent, protect against, mitigate the effects of, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks and other disasters.¹ DHS allocated more than half of this total (\$22.3 billion) to grant recipients through four of the largest preparedness programs— the Urban Areas Security Initiative, the State Homeland Security Program, the Port Security Grant Program, and the Transit Security Grant Program.

The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (Post-Katrina Act) was enacted in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.² In response to the Act, among other things, DHS centralized most of its preparedness programs under the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—a component of DHS—to better integrate and coordinate grant management. The act also requires that FEMA develop a national preparedness system and assess preparedness capabilities to determine the nation’s preparedness capability levels and the resources needed to achieve desired levels of capability.³

¹This total is based on Congressional Research Service data and our analysis, and includes Firefighter Assistance Grants and Emergency Management Performance Grants. See Congressional Research Service, *Department of Homeland Security Assistance to States and Localities: A Summary of Issues for the 111th Congress*, R40246 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 30, 2010). For the purposes of this testimony, we define capabilities for prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery as preparedness capabilities.

²The Post-Katrina Act was enacted as Title VI of the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2007, Pub. L. No. 109-295, 120 Stat. 1355 (2006). The provisions of the Post-Katrina Act became effective upon enactment, October 4, 2006, with the exception of certain organizational changes related to FEMA, most of which took effect on March 31, 2007.

³According to the act, the assessment system must assess, among other things, current capability levels as compared with target capability levels (which, for the purposes of this testimony, we refer to as capability requirements), and resource needs to meet capability requirements. 6 U.S.C. §§ 744, 749.

My testimony today addresses the following questions: (1) To what extent has FEMA made progress in managing four of the largest preparedness grant programs? (2) To what extent has FEMA made progress measuring preparedness by assessing capabilities?

My statement is based on reports and testimonies on DHS and FEMA grant management and preparedness assessment that we issued from July 2005 through March 2013.⁴ More information about the scope and methodology of our prior work can be found in those reports. To update this work, we analyzed documentation such as DHS's *National Preparedness Report* issued in May 2013 and the DHS Fiscal Year 2014 Budget-in-Brief, and interviewed and obtained updated information on preparedness grants and capability assessment from FEMA officials in June 2013. We conducted our work in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

Preparedness Grants

Over the past decade, the federal government has expanded financial assistance to a wide array of public and private stakeholders for preparedness activities through various grant programs administered by DHS through its component agency, FEMA. Through these grant programs, DHS has sought to enhance the capacity of states, localities, and other entities, such as ports or transit agencies, to prevent, respond to, and recover from a natural or man-made disaster, including terrorist incidents. Four of the largest preparedness grant programs are the Urban Areas Security Initiative, the State Homeland Security Program, Port Security Grant Program, and the Transit Security Grant Program.

⁴For example, GAO, *Homeland Security: DHS's Efforts to Enhance First Responders' All-Hazards Capabilities Continue to Evolve*, [GAO-05-652](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 11, 2005); *Government Operations: Opportunities to Reduce Potential Duplication in Government Programs, Save Tax Dollars, and Enhance Revenue*, [GAO-11-318SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 1, 2011); and *National Preparedness: FEMA Has Made Progress in Improving Grant Management and Assessing Capabilities, but Challenges Remain*, [GAO-13-456T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 19, 2013).

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- **The Urban Areas Security Initiative provides** federal assistance to address the unique needs of high-threat, high-density urban areas, and assists the areas in building an enhanced and sustainable capacity to prevent, protect, respond to, and recover from acts of terrorism.
 - **The State Homeland Security Program** provides funding to support states' implementation of homeland security strategies to address the identified planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercise needs at the state and local levels to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from acts of terrorism and other catastrophic events.
 - **The Port Security Grant Program** provides federal assistance to strengthen the security of the nation's ports against risks associated with potential terrorist attacks by supporting increased portwide risk management, enhanced domain awareness, training and exercises, and expanded port recovery capabilities.
 - **The Transit Security Grant Program** provides funds to owners and operators of transit systems (which include intracity bus, commuter bus, ferries, and all forms of passenger rail) to protect critical surface transportation infrastructure and the traveling public from acts of terrorism and to increase the resilience of transit infrastructure.

Since its creation in April 2007, FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate (GPD) has been responsible for managing DHS's preparedness grants.⁵ GPD consolidated the grant business operations, systems, training, policy, and oversight of all FEMA grants and the program management of preparedness grants into a single entity.

National Assessment of Preparedness

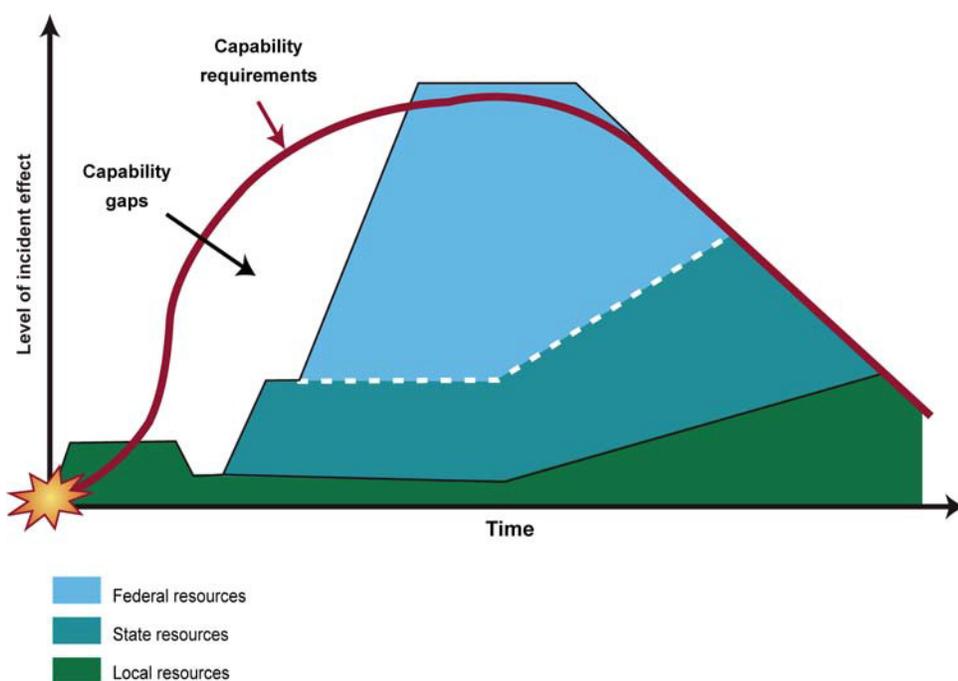
According to DHS and FEMA strategic documents, national preparedness is the shared responsibility of the "whole community," which requires the contribution of a broad range of stakeholders, including federal, state, and local governments, to develop preparedness capabilities to effectively prevent, protect against, mitigate the effects of, respond to, and recover from a major disaster.⁶ Figure 1 provides an illustration of how federal,

⁵The Post-Katrina Act transferred most of the Preparedness Directorate to FEMA, effective on March 31, 2007. Pub. L. No. 109-295, § 611(13), 120 Stat. 1355, 1400 (2006).

⁶FEMA, *FEMA Strategic Plan: Fiscal Years 2011-2014* (Washington, D.C.: February 2011), and DHS, *National Preparedness Goal* (Washington, D.C.: September 2011).

state, and local resources provide preparedness capabilities for different levels of government and at various levels of incident effect (i.e., the extent of damage caused by a natural or man-made disaster). The greater the level of incident effect, the more likely state and local resources are to be overwhelmed.

Figure 1: Conceptual Illustration for Assessing Capability Requirements and Identifying Capability Gaps for National Preparedness.



Source: GAO.

We have previously reported on and made recommendations related to DHS's and FEMA's efforts to develop a national assessment of preparedness, which would assist DHS and FEMA in effectively prioritizing investments to develop preparedness capabilities at all levels of government, including through its preparedness grant programs.⁷ Such an assessment would

⁷GAO-05-652 and GAO, *National Preparedness: FEMA Has Made Progress, but Needs to Complete and Integrate Planning, Exercise, and Assessment Efforts*, GAO-09-369 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 30, 2009).

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- identify the critical elements at all levels of government necessary to effectively prevent, protect against, mitigate the effects of, respond to, and recover from a major disaster (i.e., preparedness capabilities), such as the ability to provide lifesaving medical treatment via emergency medical services following a major disaster;
 - develop a way to measure those elements (i.e., capability performance measures); and
 - assess the difference between the amount of preparedness needed at all levels of government (i.e., capability requirements) and the current level of preparedness (i.e. capability level) to identify gaps (i.e., capability gaps).

FEMA Has Taken Actions to Enhance Management of Four Preparedness Grant Programs to Reduce the Risk of Unnecessary Duplication, but Challenges Remain

In February 2012, we identified multiple factors that contributed to the risk of FEMA potentially funding unnecessarily duplicative projects across four of the largest grant programs—the Urban Areas Security Initiative, the State Homeland Security Program, the Port Security Grant Program, and the Transit Security Grant Program.⁸ These factors include overlap among grant recipients, goals, and geographic locations, combined with differing levels of information that FEMA had available regarding grant projects and recipients. Specifically, we found that FEMA made award decisions with differing levels of information and lacked a process to coordinate application reviews.⁹ To better identify potential unnecessary duplication, we recommended that FEMA (1) take steps to ensure that it collects project information at the level of detail needed to better position the agency to identify any potential unnecessary duplication within and across the four grant programs, and (2) explore opportunities to enhance FEMA’s internal coordination and administration of the programs. DHS agreed with the recommendations and identified planned actions to improve visibility and coordination across programs and projects. We also suggested that Congress consider requiring DHS to report on the results of its efforts to identify and prevent duplication within and across the four

⁸GAO, *Homeland Security: DHS Needs Better Project Information and Coordination among Four Overlapping Grant Programs*, [GAO-12-303](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 28, 2012).

⁹GAO, *More Efficient and Effective Government: Opportunities to Reduce Duplication, Overlap and Fragmentation, Achieve Savings, and Enhance Revenue*, [GAO-12-449T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 28, 2012).

grant programs, and consider these results when making future funding decisions for these programs.

Since we issued our February 2012 report, FEMA officials have identified actions they believe will enhance management of the four grant programs we analyzed; however, FEMA still faces challenges to enhancing preparedness grant management. First, the fiscal year 2013 and 2014 President's budgets proposed the establishment of the National Preparedness Grant Program (NPGP), a consolidation of 16 grant programs (including the 4 grants we analyzed in our February 2012 report) into a comprehensive single program. According to FEMA officials, the NPGP would eliminate redundancies and requirements placed on both the federal government and grantees resulting from the existing system of multiple individual, and often disconnected, grant programs. For example, FEMA officials said that the number of applications a state would need to submit and the federal government's resources required to administer the applications would both decrease under the consolidated program. However, Members of Congress raised questions about the consolidation of the 16 grant programs and Congress did not approve the proposal in fiscal year 2013.¹⁰ The fiscal year 2014 President's budget again proposed NPGP and, according to the fiscal year 2014 DHS Budget-in-Brief, FEMA improved the proposal by incorporating stakeholder views, as directed by Congress.¹¹ If approved, and depending on its final form and execution, the consolidated NPGP could help reduce redundancies and mitigate the potential for unnecessary duplication, and may address the recommendation in our February 2012 report to enhance FEMA's internal coordination and administration of the programs.

¹⁰According to House report accompanying the DHS fiscal year 2013 appropriations bill, the NPGP proposal was denied due to the lack of congressional authorization and the lack of the necessary details that are needed for the initiation of a new program to include grant guidance and implementation plans. The committee also reported that stakeholders had expressed concern with the lack of stakeholder outreach prior to the program's introduction and directed DHS to conduct more stakeholder outreach. See H.R. Rep. No. 112-492, at 115 (2012).

¹¹For example, to address the stakeholder concern that regulated port entities and transit systems would be required to apply through their state administrative agencies, the DHS Fiscal Year 2014 Budget-in-Brief states that the fiscal year 2014 NPGP will allow for transit agencies and port areas to include their own individual applications alongside the state administrative agency applications, consistent with urban area requests.

Second, in March 2013, FEMA officials reported that the agency intends to start collecting and analyzing project-level data from grantees in fiscal year 2014; however, FEMA has not yet finalized specific data requirements and has not fully established the vehicle to collect these data—a new data system called the Non-Disaster Grants Management System (ND Grants). As of June 2013, FEMA officials expect to develop system enhancements for ND Grants to collect and use project-level data by the end of fiscal year 2013. FEMA officials stated that FEMA has formed a working group to develop the functional requirements for collecting and using project-level data and plans to obtain input from stakeholders and consider the cost-effectiveness of potential data requirements. In alignment with data requirement recommendations from a May 2011 FEMA report, the agency anticipates utilizing the new project-level data in the grant application process starting in fiscal year 2014.¹² Collecting appropriate data and implementing ND Grants with project-level enhancements as planned, and as recommended in our February 2012 report, would better position FEMA to identify potentially unnecessary duplication within and across grant programs.

Third, in June 2012, FEMA officials stated that there are additional efforts under way to improve internal administration of different grant programs. For example, officials stated that a FEMA task force has been evaluating grants management processes and developing a series of recommendations to improve efficiencies, address gaps, and increase collaboration across regional and headquarters counterparts and financial and programmatic counterparts. These activities represent positive steps to improve overall grants management, but officials did not identify any specific mechanisms to identify potentially duplicative projects across grant programs administered by different FEMA entities.

¹²FEMA, *Redundancy Elimination and Enhanced Performance for Preparedness Grants Act: Fiscal Year 2011 Report to Congress* (Washington, D.C.: May 23, 2011).

FEMA Has Made Progress in Establishing National Preparedness Capabilities, but Challenges Remain in Establishing Performance Measures That Could Assist in Prioritizing Grant Funding

FEMA Has Faced Challenges Developing a National Assessment of Preparedness

We have previously found that DHS and FEMA have faced challenges in developing and implementing a national assessment of preparedness. For example:

- In July 2005, we reported that DHS had identified potential challenges in gathering the information needed to assess preparedness capabilities, including determining how to aggregate data from federal, state, local, and tribal governments and others and integrating self-assessment approaches.¹³
- In April 2009, we reported that establishing quantifiable metrics for capabilities was a prerequisite to developing assessment data that can be compared across all levels of government.¹⁴ However, in analyzing FEMA's efforts to assess capabilities, we reported that FEMA faced methodological challenges with regard to (1) differences in available data, (2) variations in reporting structures across states, and (3) variations in the level of detail within data sources requiring subjective interpretation.

¹³ [GAO-05-652](#).

¹⁴ [GAO-09-369](#).

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- In March 2011, we reported that FEMA's efforts to develop and implement a comprehensive, measurable national preparedness assessment were not yet complete. Accordingly, we recommended that FEMA complete a national preparedness assessment and that such an assessment should assess capability gaps at each level of government based on capability requirements to enable prioritization of grant funding.¹⁵ We also suggested that Congress consider limiting preparedness grant funding until FEMA completes a national preparedness assessment. In the fiscal year 2011 and 2012 appropriations bills, Congress reduced funding for preparedness grants by \$875 million and \$1.28 billion less than the amount requested, respectively, and the House committee report accompanying the DHS appropriations bill for fiscal year 2012 noted that FEMA could not demonstrate how the use of the grants had enhanced disaster preparedness.¹⁶ Similarly, in fiscal year 2013, Congress reduced funding for FEMA preparedness grants by about \$400 million from the amount requested.¹⁷

¹⁵[GAO-11-318SP](#).

¹⁶In April 2011, Congress passed the fiscal year 2011 appropriations act for DHS, which reduced funding for FEMA preparedness grants by \$875 million from the amount requested in the President's fiscal year 2011 budget. See Pub. L. No. 112-10, § 1632, 125 Stat. 38, 143 (2011). The consolidated appropriations act for fiscal year 2012 appropriated \$1.7 billion for FEMA preparedness grants, \$1.28 billion less than requested. See Pub. L. No. 112-74, 125 Stat. 786, 960-62 (2011). This total includes all grant programs in the state and local programs account and the Emergency Management Performance Grant program but does not include funding appropriated for firefighter assistance grant programs. The House committee report accompanying the DHS appropriations bill for fiscal year 2012 stated that FEMA could not demonstrate how the use of the grants had enhanced disaster preparedness. See H.R. Rep. No. 112-91, at 106-08 (2011).

¹⁷This total includes all grant programs in the state and local programs account and the Emergency Management Performance Grant program, as well as the firefighter assistance grant programs.

FEMA Has Made Progress in Establishing and Assessing Preparedness Capabilities, but Has Not Yet Developed Capability Requirements and Performance Measures That Could Assist in Prioritizing Grant Funding

While FEMA has taken steps to establish and assess capabilities, the agency has not yet developed clear, objective, and quantifiable capability requirements and performance measures that are needed to identify capability gaps in a national preparedness assessment, as recommended in our March 2011 report. In March 2011, the White House issued Presidential Policy Directive 8 on National Preparedness (PPD-8), which called for the development of a comprehensive approach to assess national preparedness that uses a consistent methodology with clear, objective, and quantifiable performance measures.¹⁸ PPD-8 also called for the development of a national preparedness goal, as well as annual national preparedness reports (both of which were previously required under the Post-Katrina Act).¹⁹ To address PPD-8 provisions, FEMA issued the *National Preparedness Goal* in September 2011, which establishes a list of preparedness capabilities for each of five mission areas (prevention, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery) that are to serve as the basis for preparedness activities within FEMA, throughout the federal government, and at the state and local levels.²⁰ In March 2012, FEMA issued the first annual *National Preparedness Report*, designed to identify progress made toward building, sustaining, and delivering the preparedness capabilities described in the *National Preparedness Goal* in the decade following the September 11, 2001, attacks. The second annual *National Preparedness Report* was issued in May 2013 and focuses on national accomplishments either achieved or reported during 2012. According to FEMA officials, the *National Preparedness Report* identifies what they consider to be national-level capability gaps.

FEMA officials stated that they have efforts under way to assess regional, state, and local capabilities to provide a framework for completing a

¹⁸The Post-Katrina Act required FEMA, in developing guidelines to define preparedness capabilities, to ensure that the guidelines are specific, flexible, and measurable. 6 U.S.C. § 746.

¹⁹The Post-Katrina Act also required FEMA to develop a national preparedness goal, as well as annual federal preparedness reports. 6 U.S.C. §§ 743, 752.

²⁰The *National Preparedness Goal* refers to these capabilities as core capabilities, which replace what had been previously called target capabilities. The target capabilities were initially developed by DHS in 2005. For example, one of the preparedness capabilities for the response mission area relates to mass search and rescue operations, specifically to deliver traditional and atypical search and rescue capabilities with the goal of saving the greatest number of endangered lives in the shortest time possible.

national preparedness assessment.²¹ For example, FEMA required state and local governments receiving homeland security funding to complete Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessments (THIRA) by December 31, 2012.²² Guidance issued in April 2012 for development of the THIRAs describes a process for assessing the various threats and hazards facing a community, the vulnerability of the community, as well as the consequences associated with those threats and hazards. As part of the process, state and local governments are to develop their own capability requirements. Further, FEMA officials stated that they plan to release additional guidance during the summer of 2013 to assist state and local governments with estimating capability levels based on the capability requirements they developed in their THIRAs. According to FEMA officials, these estimations will help inform annual THIRA updates and may help state and local governments to refine their capability requirements in future THIRAs.

According to FEMA officials, the THIRAs are to be used by state, regional, and federal entities for future planning and assessment efforts. At the state level, FEMA guidance notes that state officials are to use the capability requirements they identified in their respective THIRAs to assess capabilities in their future *State Preparedness Reports*, which are statewide survey-based self-assessments of capability levels and requirements submitted by all 56 U.S. states and territories. FEMA uses the *State Preparedness Reports*, in addition to other sources, to develop the *National Preparedness Report*. Because the THIRAs were first completed by the end of calendar year 2012, the 2013 *National Preparedness Report* was the first iteration of the report in which states assessed their preparedness capabilities against the capability requirements from their THIRAs. At the regional level, each of the 10 FEMA regions is to analyze the local and state THIRAs to develop

²¹[GAO-11-318SP](#).

²²According to FEMA officials, as of March 2013, some state and local urban areas had not yet completed their THIRAs. FEMA granted 6-month extensions to the December 31, 2012 deadline for five states and three local urban areas affected by Hurricane Sandy in late October 2012.

regional THIRAs.²³ At the national level, the local, state, and regional THIRAs are collectively intended to provide FEMA with data that it can analyze to assist in the identification of national funding priorities for closing capability gaps. The outcome of the THIRA process is intended to be a set of national capability performance requirements and measures, which FEMA officials stated they intend to incorporate into future National Preparedness Reports.

However, limitations associated with some of the data used in the *National Preparedness Report* may reduce the report's usefulness in assessing national preparedness. First, in October 2010, we reported that data in the *State Preparedness Reports* could be limited because FEMA relies on states to self-report such data, which makes it difficult to ensure data are consistent and accurate.²⁴ Second, because states develop their own capability requirements, and use individual judgment rather than a quantitative standard to assess preparedness capabilities, it may be difficult to identify differences and compare capability levels across states. Finally, both the 2012 and 2013 *National Preparedness Reports* describe methodological challenges. For example, the 2012 *National Preparedness Report* noted that challenges remain in measuring progress from year to year and that, in many cases, measures do not yet exist to gauge performance, either quantitatively or qualitatively. Therefore, while programs may exist that are designed to address a given capability gap, FEMA has little way of knowing whether and to what extent those programs have been successful. Thus, as of June 2013, FEMA has not yet completed a national preparedness assessment, as we recommended in our March 2011 report, which could assist FEMA in prioritizing grant funding.

Depending on how the THIRA and *National Preparedness Report* processes evolve, such an approach to capability assessment could be a

²³FEMA officials stated that they required the FEMA regions to complete their inaugural THIRAs by September 30, 2012, 3 months before the local and state THIRAs were due. As a result, the first regional THIRAs did not incorporate information from the local and state THIRAs. The officials explained that FEMA directed the regional THIRAs to be completed in 2012 before the local and state THIRAs in order to aid development of preparedness grant guidance for fiscal year 2013, but that future iterations of the regional THIRAs are intended to incorporate information from completed local and state THIRAs.

²⁴GAO, *FEMA Has Made Limited Progress in Efforts to Develop and Implement a System to Assess National Preparedness Capabilities*, [GAO-11-51R](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 29, 2010).

positive step toward addressing our March 2011 recommendation to FEMA to develop a national preparedness assessment of existing capabilities levels against capability requirements. Such a national preparedness assessment may help FEMA to (1) identify the potential costs for developing and maintaining required capabilities at each level of government, and (2) determine what capabilities federal agencies should be prepared to provide. While the recently completed THIRAs and 2013 *National Preparedness Report* are positive steps in the initial efforts to assess preparedness capabilities across the nation, capability requirements and performance measures for each level of government that are clear, objective, and quantifiable have not yet been developed. As a result, it is unclear what capability gaps currently exist, including at the federal level, and what level of resources will be needed to close such gaps through prioritized preparedness grant funding. We will continue to monitor FEMA's efforts to develop capability requirements and performance measures.

Chairman Begich, Ranking Member Paul, and members of the subcommittee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

For further information about this statement, please contact David C. Maurer, Director, Homeland Security and Justice Issues, at (202) 512-9627 or maurerd@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. In addition to the contact named above, the following individuals also made major contributions to this testimony: Chris Keisling, Assistant Director; Tracey King; David Lysy; Erin O'Brien; and Ben Rosenbaum.

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