

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-101](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Recent emergencies, such as earthquakes in the nation's capital, have raised concerns about how prepared federal agencies are in the 9,600 facilities owned or leased by GSA and protected by the Department of Homeland Security's FPS to safely evacuate occupants in federal buildings. All federal agencies are required to prepare OEPs for their facilities, which describe actions agencies should take to plan for a safe evacuation during an emergency.

GAO was asked to provide information on how prepared GSA-owned and -leased facilities are to evacuate occupants during an emergency. This report describes (1) who is responsible for ensuring that federal facilities have OEPs in place and the extent to which selected facilities' OEPs reflect federal guidance, and (2) the evacuation challenges, if any, selected facilities experienced and what actions, if any, they reported taking to address these issues.

GAO reviewed federal regulations and guidance on OEPs, including documents from ISC, GSA, and FPS, which develop governmentwide physical security standards and policies, such as minimum elements for OEPs. GAO also reviewed OEPs and interviewed facility officials at 20 GSA-owned and -leased facilities, selected based on geographic dispersion, recent evacuations, and facility security level. While not generalizable to all GSA-owned and -leased facilities the results provided perspectives of varying facilities.

DHS written and technical comments were incorporated, as appropriate. GSA did not have any comments.

View [GAO-14-101](#). For more information, contact Joseph Kirschbaum at (202) 512-9971 or [kirschbaumj@gao.gov](mailto:kirschbaumj@gao.gov) or Mark Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or [goldsteinm@gao.gov](mailto:goldsteinm@gao.gov).

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## FEDERAL FACILITIES

### Selected Facilities' Emergency Plans Generally Reflect Federal Guidance

## What GAO Found

Federal agencies occupying facilities owned or leased by the General Services Administration (GSA) are responsible for preparing and maintaining occupant emergency plans (OEP), with assistance or guidance from the Federal Protective Service (FPS) and others, and the majority of selected federal facilities' OEPs GAO reviewed reflect federal guidance. As required by federal regulations, all 20 selected facilities had OEPs and had designated officials, who are responsible for maintaining OEPs and initiating action according to the OEP in the event of an emergency, including the evacuation of facility occupants. Consistent with federal guidance, officials at 19 of the 20 selected facilities reported that they review and update OEPs at least annually, and officials at 1 facility said they were in the process of updating their OEP. When requested, FPS provides OEP guidance, such as templates to facility officials. Officials at 14 facilities reported using FPS guidance or feedback for their OEPs, officials at 1 facility reported not using FPS guidance, and officials at 5 facilities said they used their own agency's guidance. FPS also checks OEPs during periodic facility security assessments—conducted at least every 3 to 5 years—to assess overall facility risk. GSA officials said they have a role in coordinating directly with facilities to provide guidance and feedback on OEPs, and to help facility officials plan drills and exercises. To assist agency officials as they develop OEPs that best fit individual facilities and agency needs, the Interagency Security Committee (ISC), a Department of Homeland Security–chaired policy development organization, in April 2010 identified 10 minimum elements, such as exercises or evacuating occupants with special needs, that should be addressed in an OEP. Thirteen of the 20 selected facilities addressed all 10 minimum elements in OEPs or related documents. Seven facilities' OEPs did not address at least 1 of the 10 elements; however, lack of an element does not necessarily indicate potential vulnerabilities for that facility because the intent of the element may be addressed by other procedures or modified based on facility characteristics. For example, evacuation exercises were not included in OEPs for 2 facilities located in leased GSA space; however, officials said they participate in drills conducted by building management. The 20 selected facility OEPs were unique to each facility and how OEPs addressed particular elements.

Officials at 14 of 20 facilities identified evacuation challenges. The most frequently cited challenges included employee apathy toward participating in drills, accounting for employees, and keeping contact information updated. Officials at all but one facility, which was updating its OEP, reported various ways they addressed evacuation challenges, including using technology such as entry scan systems and radios to track and communicate with employees and making evacuation training more interesting to employees. Other incidents and emerging threats also prompted officials to change OEPs or evacuation training. For example, during the 2011 Washington, D.C., earthquake, officials at selected facilities in the D.C. area said that the lack of employee training on earthquake procedures may have exposed employees to potential hazards when they self-evacuated. Officials reported revising their OEPs to include procedures for earthquakes. Recent shootings also prompted facility officials to revise their OEPs and participate in FPS awareness training on active shooter incidents. Officials at 6 facilities did not report challenges.