

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104289](#), a report to congressional addressees

## Why GAO Did This Study

BOP is responsible for the care and custody of over 150,000 federal inmates and the maintenance and repair of 122 institutions. Natural disasters, such as hurricanes, can present a specific danger to inmates and staff who may not be able to evacuate, due to security measures.

Senate Report 116-127 includes a provision for GAO to examine how BOP protects inmates during disasters. This report addresses BOP's (1) preparation for disasters; (2) tracking and analysis of disaster-related repair projects; (3) approach to managing disaster response and related impacts; and (4) identification and sharing of lessons learned from, and assessment of vulnerability to, disasters.

GAO reviewed BOP guidance, policy, and data on maintenance and repair projects. GAO also interviewed officials from a nongeneralizable sample of six BOP institutions, selected, in part, on the basis of experience with a disaster from calendar years 2017 through 2020.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making eight recommendations to BOP, including establishing in policy a clear definition of disaster for tracking projects, incorporating analytic features into its data systems, systematically sharing lessons learned from disasters, and including disaster-related risks in its vulnerability assessments. BOP concurred with five of the eight recommendations. BOP did not concur with the three recommendations to incorporate analytic features into its data systems, citing among other things, questions about cost and feasibility. GAO made related modifications, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-22-104289](#). For more information, contact Gretta L. Goodwin at (202) 512-8777 or [goodwin@gao.gov](mailto:goodwin@gao.gov).

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## BUREAU OF PRISONS

### Enhanced Data Capabilities, Analysis, Sharing, and Risk Assessments Needed for Disaster Preparedness

## What GAO Found

The Bureau of Prisons (BOP), within the Department of Justice, prepares for disasters by requiring its institutions to develop contingency plans outlining steps to prepare and respond to disasters and requiring staff to complete related training, which includes what constitutes a disaster.

#### Tornado Damage at a BOP Institution, April 2020



Source: Federal Bureau of Prisons. | GAO-22-104289

BOP has two data systems to collect information on maintenance and repair projects, including those related to disasters. However, BOP has not defined "disaster" for the purposes of tracking it in its data systems. Further, these systems do not include analytic features that could position BOP to identify trends in the type, timeliness, and cost of its projects. By establishing in policy a clear definition of disaster, and incorporating analytic features into its data systems—such as project milestones and cost indicators, as well as queries and alerts on these features—BOP could identify trends across projects and position itself to better address unnecessary delays or costs.

BOP has various processes for managing disaster response, including using a standardized Incident Command Structure approach and documenting and responding to the impacts of disasters on inmates and staff. For example, when a hurricane hit one BOP institution, the institution converted the visiting room and training center into staff living quarters and supplied cots, sheets, blankets, showers, and food until staff could return to their homes.

BOP lacks approaches for sharing lessons learned from all disasters and assessing institutions' disaster vulnerability. According to BOP, it identifies and shares disaster-related lessons learned through after-action reports; however, these reports are not required, and their content varies. Further, officials at all six institutions said they identified and shared lessons in other ways, such as conference calls. By implementing a systematic approach for identifying and sharing all the lessons learned and taking steps to routinely collect feedback from institutions on their application, BOP could have greater assurance that institutions are leveraging lessons to prepare for future disasters. Further, BOP's approach for assessing institutions' vulnerability focuses on security-related risks, not disaster-related risks, such as building damage. By expanding assessments to include disaster-related risks, BOP could leverage opportunities to build resilience and reduce institutions' risk to damage from future disasters.