

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-106046](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives.

Why GAO Did This Study

Each year, disasters such as hurricanes and wildfires affect hundreds of American communities. The federal government provides billions of dollars to individuals and communities that have suffered damages. According to the U.S. Global Change Research Program, extreme weather events are projected to become more frequent and intense in parts of the U.S. as a result of changes in the climate. Investments in disaster resilience can reduce the overall impact of future disasters and costs.

This testimony discusses GAO reports issued from 2015 through 2021 on disaster preparedness and resilience. This includes FEMA's National Preparedness System and associated grants; hazard mitigation grant programs; and GAO's Disaster Resilience Framework for identifying opportunities to enhance resilience. The statement also describes actions taken to address GAO's prior recommendations through March 2022.

For the prior work, GAO reviewed relevant documents, including agency policies, strategic plans, and other reports. GAO also interviewed federal and state officials, and a range of relevant stakeholders. For recommendation updates, GAO reviewed agency documentation.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations in prior reports to address issues discussed in this statement. FEMA has taken steps to address some of these recommendations, and GAO continues to monitor agency progress in implementing them.

View [GAO-22-106046](#). For more information, contact Chris Currie at (404) 679-1875 or currie@gao.gov.

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DISASTER RESILIENCE

Opportunities to Improve National Preparedness

What GAO Found

GAO has evaluated federal efforts to strengthen national preparedness and resilience and identified opportunities for improvement in several key areas:

- **FEMA Efforts to Strengthen National Preparedness.** The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—the lead agency for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery—assesses the nation's emergency management capabilities and provides grants to help state, local, tribal, and territorial governments address capability gaps. In May 2020, [GAO found](#) that FEMA and jurisdictions have identified emergency management capability gaps in key areas such as recovery and mitigation. GAO recommended that FEMA determine steps needed to address these capability gaps. FEMA agreed and plans to develop an investment strategy that aligns resources with capability gaps.
- **FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Programs.** In February 2021, [GAO found](#) that state and local officials faced challenges with FEMA's hazard mitigation grant programs. Specifically, officials GAO interviewed from 10 of 12 selected jurisdictions said grant application processes were complex and lengthy. This could discourage investment in projects that would enhance disaster resilience. FEMA officials said they intended to identify opportunities to streamline, but did not have a plan for doing so. GAO recommended that FEMA develop such a plan. FEMA agreed and is in the process of doing so.
- **Identifying Opportunities to Enhance Disaster Resilience.** In October 2019, GAO issued [a framework](#) to guide analysis of federal actions to promote resilience to natural disasters and changes in the climate. For example, the framework can help identify options to address government-wide challenges that are of a scale and scope not addressed by existing programs.

Examples of Hazard Mitigation Projects



Culvert with a protective headwall that prevents erosion and allows water to pass under a road



Watertight enclosure to prevent floodwater damage



Structure elevation to mitigate flood damage

Source: GAO. | GAO-22-106046