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# Homeland Security News Wire



**Grid**

## DHS efforts to address EMP threats to the electric grid fall short: GAO

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**A report by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) found that as of July 2015, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has taken several actions that could help address electromagnetic threats to the electric grid. Although these are positive steps, GAO says that its preliminary work indicates that DHS has not effectively coordinated with stakeholders to identify critical assets or collect necessary risk information, among other responsibilities.**



An entire city would be plunged into darkness in an EMP attack // Source: commons.wikimedia.org

A report by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) found that as of July 2015, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has taken several actions that could help address electromagnetic threats to the electric grid. GAO's preliminary analysis of DHS's actions shows that they generally fell under four categories: (1) developing reports, (2) identifying mitigation efforts, (3) strategy development and planning, and (4) conducting exercises. For example:

- *Impacts of Severe Space Weather on the Electric Grid.* This 2011 report evaluated how previous solar storms have affected electric grids, and identified potential cost-effective mitigation equipment available to protect these grids, among other topics. *RecX.* In 2012, DHS Science & Technology (S&T) partnered with industry to develop a prototype transformer which could significantly reduce the time to transport, install, and energize a transformer to aid recovery from power outages associated with transformer failures from several months to less than one week.

DHS reported its actions were not taken in response to the 2008 recommendations of the [Commission to Assess the Threat to the United States from Electromagnetic Pulse Attack](http://www.empcommission.org/) (EMP Commission).

GAO also [says](http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/671554.pdf) that it recognizes that DHS does not have a statutory obligation specifically to address the recommendations, but implementation of them could help mitigate electromagnetic impacts to the electric grid, such as helping to assure the protection of high-value transmission assets.

Moreover, GAO says its preliminary work suggests that DHS, in conjunction with the Department of Energy (DOE), has not fully addressed a key critical infrastructure protection responsibility — identification of clear internal agency roles and responsibilities related to addressing electromagnetic threats. For example, although DHS recognized one component as the lead for assessing solar weather risks, the component has not yet identified any specific roles related to collecting or analyzing risk information.

DHS has also coordinated with federal and industry stakeholders to address some, but not all, risks to the electrical grid since the EMP Commission issued its recommendations.

GAO preliminarily identified eight projects in which DHS coordinated with stakeholders to help protect the grid, including developing plans to address long-term power outages, participation in exercises, and research and development activities.

Although these are positive steps, GAO says that its preliminary work indicates that DHS has not effectively coordinated with stakeholders to identify critical assets or collect necessary risk information, among other responsibilities. GAO says it will continue to assess the issues and will issue a report with the final results later this year.

— Read more in [Critical Infrastructure Protection: Federal Agencies Have Taken Actions to Address Electromagnetic Risks, but Opportunities Exist to Further Assess Risks and Strengthen Collaboration](http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-16-243), GAO-16-243 (25 April 2016)

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