



One Hundred Twelfth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

November 17, 2011

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G St., NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

As the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) moves forward with testing of the BioWatch Generation 3 (Gen-3) detector system, with a potential life-cycle cost of \$5.7 billion, we must ensure that the testing and acquisition process has the rigor and transparency needed to ensure a successful acquisition. GAO previously reported failures in the Department's acquisition track record. The Department's experiences with SBInet and the Advanced Spectroscopic Portal program, for example, should send a warning signal to DHS to strengthen its acquisition process for future major technology acquisitions. In order to avoid future major and costly acquisition failures, we request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) specifically investigate elements of the Gen-3 acquisition process as detailed further below.

Environmental biodetection offers the potential for detection of a bioterrorism attack well in advance of the emergence of symptoms and hospitalizations, therefore allowing for early medical intervention and an enhanced opportunity to save lives. The BioWatch Gen-3 program could provide a major advancement in the nation's biodefense posture by enabling faster life-saving responses. The DHS Office of Health Affairs (OHA) has been appropriated millions of dollars over several years to develop, test, and acquire next-generation BioWatch technology that would automate the system with the aim of significantly reducing the time to detect.

We must ensure that OHA has undertaken a rigorous determination of the capabilities of the next generation biodetection system under consideration for acquisition, and a trade-off analysis to determine its benefit over the existing system or other reasonable alternatives. We therefore ask GAO to examine the following:

1. **Requirements:** The basis for the requirements for a next-generation biodetection system and the ability of any Gen-3 candidate technologies to meet those requirements based on existing test data.
2. **Coordination with the Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate:** The extent of coordination between S&T and OHA in the development and testing of Gen-3 candidate technologies to date, and recommendations for S&T and OHA engagement in the future to reduce the risk of duplicative efforts and wasteful spending and increase the likelihood that this program or its successor is a success.
3. **Cost benefit analysis:** The extent a cost-benefit analysis (CBA) for Gen-3 has been conducted to demonstrate that the new generation of technology would provide a significant and financially worthwhile improvement over the currently deployed system or other meaningful alternatives, the adequacy of any CBA conducted to date and its reliance on actual test results of current and new systems, and recommendations to ensure the CBA provides a sound analytical basis for acquiring and deploying Gen-3 technology.
4. **Acquisition decisions:** The criteria being used by OHA and the Acquisition Review Board at key decision points along the Gen-3 acquisition pathway, how these criteria relate to technical and operational requirements, and whether OHA is adhering to these criteria.
5. **Concepts of operations:** The extent to which a concept of operations (CONOPs) plan for how Gen-3 would be used by state and local end-users has been developed and agreed to and recommendations on where in the acquisition lifecycle a CONOPs plan would be needed to inform decision-making.

The Gen-3 technology represents one of the Department's major acquisition programs. While an improved biodetection capability has the potential to save more lives after a bioterrorism attack, we must ensure that DHS's substantial investment yields the greatest possible level of detection capability and demonstrable increase in security at the lowest possible cost. We would like the GAO's findings and recommendations to be made available as soon as feasible, ideally to inform future investments by OHA in the Gen-3 program.

We look forward to receiving your response and to working with you on this request.

Sincerely,



DANIEL E. LUNGREN
Chairman
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity,
Infrastructure Protection, and
Security Technologies



GUS M. BILIRAKIS
Chairman
Subcommittee on Emergency
Preparedness, Response,
and Communications