

**SUMMARY
OF
JOINT INQUIRY REVIEW
OF
ANTHRAX ATTACKS**

In October 2001, the Congress, the United States Postal Service (USPS), and elements of the domestic infrastructure were the targets of anthrax attacks that eventually killed five Americans. The Joint Inquiry requested that the General Accounting Office review those attacks, focusing on the difficulty of producing and spreading anthrax, mail as a delivery system, the status of USPS efforts to detect anthrax, the federal investigation into the attacks, and how the government is preparing for other incidents.

When the Joint Inquiry report was filed, the GAO investigation had been substantially completed, with an initial finding that no consensus exists among experts regarding the ease with which terrorists or a disgruntled scientist could effectively produce and disseminate anthrax on U.S. soil. According to the GAO, technical experts believe that it would be very difficult to overcome technical and operational challenges to produce and deliver biological warfare agents sufficient to cause mass casualties.

According to the experts the GAO interviewed, delivery of anthrax by mail is not as efficient a method of producing mass casualties as military technologies. However, in the public's mind and in terms of economic damage, anthrax powder in the mail represents a potentially significant problem. The USPS effort to defend against biological agents illustrates a key aspect of homeland defense: the distinction between reactive and proactive operational environments. Whereas the nation's posture had been to prevent attacks against military facilities, the anthrax attacks targeted civilian facilities that unprepared to react.