

DOCUMENT RESUME

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Stockpile of Lethal Chemical Munitions and Agents--Better Management Needed. LCD-77-205; B-166842. September 14, 1977.

Report to the Congress; by Elmer B. Staats, Comptroller General.

Issue Area: Facilities and Material Management: Supply and Maintenance Operations Reporting Systems (703); Military Preparedness Plans: Military Forces Readiness (805).

Contact: Logistics and Communications Div.

Budget Function: National Defense: Department of Defense - Military (except procurement & contracts) (051).

Organization Concerned: Department of Defense; Department of the Army.

Congressional Relevance: House Committee on Armed Services; Senate Committee on Armed Services; Congress.

The United States has a large stockpile of lethal chemical munitions and agents to deter another country from using chemical warfare and to retaliate if deterrence fails. The stockpile consists of various munitions and bulk containers filled with nerve agents and mustard gas. They are stored in eight continental United States and two overseas locations managed by the Army. Visits to five of the storage sites showed that improvements were needed in inspection and maintenance, storage and handling, safety and security, and demilitarization and disposal of the stockpile. Findings/Conclusions: Department of Defense officials have testified in congressional hearings that the stockpile is deteriorating and that much of it is unserviceable. The true condition of the stockpile is unknown. Recommendations: To more accurately reflect the stockpile's condition, the Army should: revise the classification and reporting criteria to clearly distinguish between functional and nonfunctional defects; require random sampling techniques and store material so it will be most accessible and facilitate this sampling; stop classifying entire production lots as unserviceable because of a few defects when reporting on the stockpile's condition; and complete the special testing program for determining the lethality of the chemical filler. In addition, the Army should define overall stockpile requirements; stop disposing of usable stocks until stockpile requirements have been defined; and formulate short-term and long-term guidelines for demilitarizing and disposing of the stockpile. (Author/SC)

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COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S  
REPORT TO THE CONGRESS

STOCKPILE OF LETHAL CHEMICAL  
MUNITIONS AND AGENTS--  
BETTER MANAGEMENT NEEDED  
Department of Defense

D I G E S T

SEP 14 1977

The United States has a large stockpile of lethal chemical munitions and agents to deter another country from using chemical warfare and to retaliate if deterrence fails.

The stockpile consists of various munitions and bulk containers filled with nerve agents and mustard gas. The munitions and agents cost about \$200 million. They are stored in eight continental U.S. and two overseas locations. The Department of the Army manages the stockpile.

GAO visited five storage sites and found that improvements were needed in inspection and maintenance, storage and handling, safety and security, and demilitarization (changing the munitions so they cannot be used militarily) and disposal of the stockpile.

Department of Defense officials have testified in congressional hearings that the stockpile is deteriorating and that much of it is unserviceable. They said that the stockpile was inadequate in quantity and quality; consequently, they requested funds to prepare to produce a new chemical munition known as a binary. (Binaries consist of two relatively harmless chemical components that do not become lethal until mixed.)

The true condition of the stockpile is unknown. Its serviceability may have been greatly understated. For example, many of the unserviceable classifications are a result of minor nonfunctional defects, such as container rust, which do not affect usability. Also, inspection samples are neither random nor representative, block storage hampers access during inspection, entire production lots are classified unserviceable for a few defects, and chemical agent testing recently has been limited. (See ch. 2.)

Without knowing the true condition of the stockpile, Defense and the Congress cannot validly assess the offensive chemical warfare capability. To more accurately reflect the stockpile's condition, the Army should:

- Revise the classification and reporting criteria to clearly distinguish between functional and nonfunctional detects.
- Require random sampling techniques and store material so it will be most accessible and facilitate this sampling.
- Stop classifying entire production lots as unserviceable because of a few defects when reporting on the stockpile's condition.
- Complete as soon as possible the special testing program for determining the lethality of the chemical filler. (See ch. 2.)

Little has been done to maintain the stockpile in a serviceable condition or to restore the unserviceable portions. Using anticipated approval of the binary program as a reason for not maintaining the stockpile is inconsistent with sound management. Lack of maintenance could seriously compromise U.S. retaliatory capabilities. (See ch. 3.)

If the stockpile's condition is as poor as Defense officials say, they should do everything possible to complete maintenance quickly. If, on the other hand, unserviceability is overstated, the Congress should be told so; perhaps only limited maintenance will be required. The Army should restore the part of the stockpile of lethal chemical munitions and agents that is necessary and thereafter continue to maintain the stockpile in a usable condition. (See ch. 3.)

GAO did only limited work on the safety and security of the chemical stockpile because of Army efforts to identify and correct deficiencies in these areas. Additionally, physical security standards for chemical munitions are being upgraded to equal those

required for nuclear munitions. The Army studies and actions underway or planned to revise standards, upgrade security, and reduce safety incidents demonstrate an awareness of the need for good controls over safety and security. (See ch. 4.)

The Army has demilitarized and disposed of large quantities of usable lethal chemical agents and munitions, yet at the same time, it has said that the lethal chemical stockpile is inadequate. Additionally, the Army has prepared a long-range plan for eventually disposing of the entire existing stockpile of lethal chemical munitions and agents. The Army has spent over \$150 million to demilitarize and dispose of some munitions and agents, and if the remaining stockpile is disposed of, it may spend \$640 million to \$870 million more. (See ch. 5.)

The Army should determine its overall needs before demilitarizing and disposing of additional usable stocks and committing hundreds of millions of dollars to disposing of the entire stockpile. The Army may be premature in basing its long-range plans on the premise that the entire chemical stockpile will be disposed of. (See ch. 5.)

The Army should:

- Define overall stockpile requirements.
- Stop disposing of usable stocks until stockpile requirements have been defined.
- Formulate short- and long-term guidelines for demilitarizing and disposing of the stockpile. (See ch. 5.)

In commenting on the report, the Department of Defense agreed generally with the findings but not with some of the conclusions and recommendations. (See app. I.)

Its disagreement related primarily to GAO's suggestions for more accurately describing the condition of the stockpile. Defense feels

that existing criteria are adequate. GAO continues to believe that improvements are needed. (See ch. 2.)

Defense agreed with other recommended actions, such as restoring and maintaining the stockpile in a usable condition, but indicated that limited staffing and funding would prevent quick implementation of the recommendations.

The Congress may not agree with the relatively low priority Defense gives to the stockpile's maintenance. GAO recommends that Defense and the Congress establish a joint position on the readiness level at which the chemical stockpile should be maintained. (See ch. 3.)