

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-498](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Commercial carriers transport over 3 billion tons of HAZMAT in commerce in the United States each year, transporting an estimated 1 million HAZMAT shipments per day. DOD relies heavily on commercial carriers to transport HAZMAT, using them to transport about 90 percent of the department's HAZMAT shipments. DOD uses the TPS program to transport certain sensitive materials including ammunition and classified materials that follow more stringent safety and security standards.

House Report 113-446 accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 directed DOD to report on the root causes of improper documentation and packaging of HAZMAT; the extent to which TPS is used for materials that could be transported using less costly means; and any needed corrective actions and a plan, with milestones, to address them. The House report also included a provision for GAO to review DOD's report. DOD issued its report in September 2015.

This report examines the extent to which DOD (1) identified the root causes of improper documentation and packaging of HAZMAT shipments and any corrective actions taken since the report's issuance and (2) reported on the department's use of TPS carriers to transport shipments that could have been safely and securely transported using less costly alternatives.

GAO examined DOD's HAZMAT data and found the data it examined sufficiently reliable for the purposes of the review.

DOD reviewed a draft of this report and did not have any comments.

View [GAO-17-498](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

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DEFENSE TRANSPORTATION

DOD Has Taken Actions to Address Hazardous Material Transportation Issues but It Is Too Soon to Evaluate the Effectiveness of These Efforts

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has addressed the committee direction to identify the root causes regarding the improper documentation and packaging of hazardous materials (HAZMAT) shipments and any needed corrective actions, but it is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts. In its September 2015 report, DOD identified:

- contract- and documentation-related issues and human error as the root causes,
- several corrective actions—such as improved reporting—that aligned with these root causes, and
- milestones and DOD stakeholders to implement the corrective actions.

In addition to aligning with the DOD-identified root causes, the corrective actions also align with the root causes of improper documentation and packaging that GAO identified in its May 2014 report. However, it is too early to determine the efficacy of these corrective actions. According to DOD officials, most of the corrective actions were to begin in late fiscal year 2016, and the key performance measures for assessing those and the remaining actions will not be fully completed until late fiscal year 2017.

DOD has addressed the committee direction to report on the extent to which the department had used Transportation Protective Services (TPS) for HAZMAT shipments that could have been safely and securely transported using less costly alternatives, but did not include in its September 2015 report detail on the assumptions or limitations made underpinning its analysis. In its analysis, conducted specifically to address the committee direction, DOD concluded that it had used TPS infrequently when not required between June 1, 2013, and July 31, 2014. Specifically, DOD reported it used TPS to transport 518 of 31,373 HAZMAT shipments that it could have transported using less costly alternatives. This resulted in a total unnecessary cost of approximately \$126,000, according to DOD. While GAO found DOD did not include detail on the assumptions or limitations underpinning its analysis, GAO concurs with the report's general conclusion that DOD had infrequently used TPS unnecessarily to transport HAZMAT during the period studied and that the additional cost associated with these shipments was relatively small. Further, as part of its plan of action, DOD has identified corrective actions to preclude future unnecessary use of TPS, which, if properly implemented, should help ensure that in the future DOD uses TPS only when necessary.