



Highlights of [GAO-03-417](#), a report to Senate and House Committees on Armed Services and Subcommittees on Defense, Senate and House Committees on Appropriations

DEFENSE INFRASTRUCTURE

Personnel Reductions Have Not Hampered Most Commissaries' Store Operations and Customer Service

Why GAO Did This Study

In response to concerns about the impact of proposed cuts in the Defense Commissary Agency's workforce, the House Armed Services Committee placed in its report on the Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2003 a requirement that we evaluate the effect of the personnel reductions. Specifically, we assessed (1) the status of personnel reductions and how they have affected store operations and customer service, and (2) whether the agency uses a reliable methodology to measure customer satisfaction with its commissaries.

What GAO Recommends

We are recommending that the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) require the Director of the Defense Commissary Agency to: (1) update the agency's strategic plan to include goals that identify the percentage of the store workforce that is expected to be full- and part-time, (2) reassess management staffing for small stores, (3) adjust customer survey results on the basis of a store's sales volume, (4) collect data on customers who refuse to fill out survey forms, and (5) examine potential survey methods to periodically determine how many potential customers do not shop at commissaries and the reasons why not. The Department of Defense agreed with four of our five recommendations. It disagreed with the recommendation to identify goals for the projected workforce mix.

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To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Barry Holman at (202) 512-8412 or holmanb@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Defense Commissary Agency's commissary operations and customer services have been maintained at the same level, and in some cases improved, despite the recent reductions in workforce. As of December 31, 2002, the agency had completed most of its 3,047 planned personnel reductions in full-time positions. It accomplished this primarily by achieving efficiencies or eliminating vacant positions in the stores. Only 122 employees have been separated and 341 retired as a result of the personnel cutbacks.

A major focus of DeCA's personnel reductions, as outlined in its strategic plan, was to reshape the workforce and develop a more efficient organization. We found that commissaries are making greater use of part-time employees because of the reductions. This has allowed some stores to increase their operating hours to better meet customer needs. It has also given store managers more flexibility in meeting workload fluctuations. However, DeCA's strategic plan does not include specific goals for achieving a certain full-time/part-time workforce mix in stores. As a result, the planned percentage of part-time positions varies widely by store. A recent customer satisfaction survey showed that commissary patrons expressed high satisfaction with their overall shopping experience, as well as with such key indicators as time waiting in line and convenient hours. However, the managers of the smaller commissaries reported concerns over balancing workload and maintaining store operations.

We found that the Commissary Customer Satisfaction Survey methodology is reasonable. However, some improvements in the analysis of survey data could ensure that the findings are more complete and consistent. Such changes could include adjusting survey results for the volume of sales at individual stores or for the number of shoppers who refuse to fill out the questionnaire. Furthermore, the current survey does not collect information on the number of, and reasons why, potential customers do not shop at their local commissaries.

Planned Personnel Reductions by Organizational Level

Organization	Fiscal year 2000 baseline	Reductions in full-time positions	
		Planned	Actual 12/31/02
Headquarters ^a	911	187	116
Regional offices	590	170	170
Stores	16,565	2,690	2,316
Total	18,066	3,047	2,602

Source: DeCA.

^aIncludes field operating activities.