



Highlights of [GAO-05-534](#), a report to the Secretary of Defense

MILITARY TRAINING

Better Planning and Funding Priority Needed to Improve Conditions of Military Training Ranges

Why GAO Did This Study

Military training ranges are important national assets and play a critical role in preparing military forces for their wartime mission. The Department of Defense (DOD) has reported for years that it faces increasing difficulties in carrying out realistic training at its ranges due to various constraints. While encroachment issues have had high visibility within DOD and the Congress, much less attention has been given to the overall conditions of training ranges, which can also have an adverse impact on training activities.

This report, prepared under the Comptroller General's authority, discusses (1) the condition of military training ranges and their impact on training activities, and (2) what factors are affecting DOD's progress in improving training range conditions.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that DOD take various actions designed to improve training range conditions, including the implementation of a comprehensive approach to managing its ranges in order to accomplish its transformation goals and ensure the long-term viability of its ranges. DOD agreed with the recommendations, stating the department and military services are or will be taking steps to implement them.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-534.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Barry W. Holman at (202) 512-5581 or holmanb@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

GAO's visits to eight training ranges, along with DOD's own assessments show that ranges are deteriorating and lack modernization. This adversely affects training activities and jeopardizes the safety of military personnel. To ensure readiness, servicemembers must have access to capable ranges—a key DOD transformation goal—that enables them to develop and maintain skills for wartime missions. However, GAO observed various degraded conditions at each training range visited, such as malfunctioning communication systems, impassable tank trails, overgrown areas, and outdated training areas and targets. Whenever possible, the services work around these conditions by modifying the timing, tempo, or location of training, but officials have expressed concern that workarounds are becoming increasingly difficult and costly and that they compromise the realism essential to effective training. Without adequate ranges, DOD compromises the opportunity to achieve its transformation goal and assumes the risk that its forces will be less prepared for missions and subjected to hazards.

DOD's progress in improving training range conditions has been limited and is partially attributable to a lack of a comprehensive approach to ensure that ranges provide the proper setting for effectively preparing its forces for warfare. First, while the services have individually taken a varying number of key management improvement actions, such as developing range sustainment policies, these actions lack consistency across DOD or focus primarily on encroachment without including commensurate efforts on other issues, such as maintenance and modernization. Second, even though the services cannot precisely identify the funding required and used for their ranges, identified range requirements have historically been inadequately funded, as evidenced by conditions GAO saw, and inadequately addressed. Service officials identified a variety of factors that have exacerbated funding limitations, such as ranges having a lower priority in funding decisions. Third, although DOD policy, reports, and plans have either recommended or required specific actions, DOD has not fully implemented such actions.

GAO's Analysis of DOD's Management Actions for Improving Training Range Conditions

	Policy	Sustainable range program	Strategic or implementation plan	Multilevel working groups	Range requirements	Systematic assessment of range conditions and impacts	Web-based range information management system	Local range plans
OSD	●	●	●	●	●	N/A	●	N/A
Army	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
Navy	○	●	○	●	●	●	○	●
Marine Corps	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Air Force	●	○	●	●	●	●	○	○

N/A Not applicable ○ Action not taken ● Action taken but could be improved ● Action satisfactorily taken

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.