

June 1992

DEFENSE
RELOCATION
ASSISTANCE

Service Information
Systems Operating, but
Not Yet Interactive



146708

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**National Security and
International Affairs Division**

B-248195

June 5, 1992

The Honorable Richard B. Cheney
The Secretary of Defense

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991 required that you establish relocation assistance programs by October 1, 1990, to help military service members and their families undergo "permanent change-of-station moves."¹ A key requirement of the act was to establish, by September 30, 1991, an interactive computer information system for providing relocation assistance.

We reviewed the Department of Defense's (DOD) progress in meeting the legislative requirement for an interactive information system. We are reporting on the status of this effort.

Results in Brief

DOD has not developed an interactive automated relocation information system, and the services have developed service-unique applications that do not interact with each other. The services estimate that they have spent at least \$300,000 to date developing these data base applications. DOD has issued a \$58,000 contract to study program interactivity further, but has not estimated the cost or time frame for developing and fielding an interactive system.

Background

In requiring you to establish relocation assistance programs, the Defense Authorization Act was responding, in part, to a need to provide greater assistance to military personnel transferred to a different duty station in another area. The act stipulated that the programs should, at a minimum, include information on preparing for the move, the availability and cost of housing and child care services, and spousal employment opportunities at the destination. In addition, counseling services related to financial management and stress management were to be available. As envisioned by the act, military personnel on the West Coast who were reassigned to duty stations on the East Coast could obtain information about their new locations using the computer systems at their current West Coast duty

¹When military personnel are reassigned to different duty stations for other-than-temporary duty, the move is referred to as a permanent change of station.

stations. In addition, military personnel would be able to get this information from either the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Air Force bases in the geographic area to which they were reassigned. The act required that by October 1, 1990, each geographic area having an installation with a military population of 500 or more have its own program and that military personnel in other areas have access to such a program.

Before the act, the military services provided some information and assistance to their members during the relocation process. Several different offices were charged with managing the various parts of the assistance provided. The act, which provided no funds for the program, established the responsibility for developing and implementing the relocation assistance program within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Force Management and Personnel). This office, in turn, designated the Army as "executive agent" for the development of DOD's interactive automated information system.

Status of DOD's Relocation Assistance Information System

As executive agent, the Army developed and fielded in fiscal year 1990 a software package called the Relocation Automated Information System. The software package includes 27 categories of data on locations, availability, and prices of housing in the local communities; types and locations of schools; availability and cost of child care; and spouse employment prospects and contacts. The Army's package, developed at a cost of \$150,000, was approved in fiscal year 1990 by DOD's Family Policy Coordinating Committee as the baseline software package for the services' relocation assistance programs. Furthermore, Army officials told us that, as part of a general upgrade of computer services, the Army was incorporating its software package into an existing Army-wide base-level computerized personnel information system. These upgrades will not make this application interactive with the other services' systems.

Although the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force adopted and used the 27 categories of information identified by the Army, they did not adopt the Army's software package. The Navy and Marine Corps jointly developed and used the same software. The Air Force used a demonstration system that the Air Force Aid Society made available to it free of charge. These are not interactive.

Navy and Marine Corps program officials told us that their services decided not to use the Army's software package because supporting it would be too costly. These officials explained that no one in the Navy or Marine Corps

was trained to use the Army's software. In addition, because they did not consider the software user friendly, they were concerned that adopting the Army's software would require an extensive training program. The officials said that, as an alternative, the Marine Corps translated the programming logic developed by the Army into a Navy and Marine Corps standard application at an estimated cost of \$150,000.

The Air Force has not adopted either of the software packages used by the other services. Air Force officials told us they were waiting until DOD decides on an interactive system for all of the services. They said that use of the Air Force Aid Society's system was intended to be a temporary measure. According to these officials, if the Air Force continues to use the system, the Society will require the Air Force to pay for it. They estimated that this could cost approximately \$50,000 annually.

In early 1991, officials working on Corporate Information Management, a DOD initiative that examines various automation issues within DOD, were tasked to determine ways to implement the automation portion of the relocation assistance program. However, DOD officials told us that work under this initiative on the program was delayed because of Operation Desert Storm. A work plan was approved in January 1992 for Systems Research and Applications Corporation, under contract to DOD for about \$58,000, to study interactivity. The contractor is required to analyze relocation assistance program automation and explore various ways to comply with the congressional mandates.

Program officials within DOD's Office of Force Management and Personnel expect the contractor to report its findings in the summer of 1992. They also stated that any future actions on their part will depend on the contractor's report.

Recommendations

In order to prevent further delay in the full implementation of the automated portion of the relocation assistance program as required by the law, we recommend that you

- upon receipt of the contractor's report, decide promptly on how best to provide an automated information system that has the capability for each relocation program to interact with all other relocation programs and
- require the services to implement the automated system developed as a result of that decision, and stop other duplicative systems.

Scope and Methodology

We reviewed applicable legislation and agency regulations and observed the services' relocation assistance program information systems in use. We focused on the automated information system, which we consider a key aspect of the success of the relocation assistance program. We interviewed program officials in DOD and each of the services and obtained pertinent written documents.

Our review was conducted from October 1991 to March 1992 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Although we did not obtain DOD comments on this report, we discussed the information in this report with program officials from DOD and each of the services, and incorporated their comments where appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the Chairmen, Senate and House Committees on Armed Services and Appropriations; the Chair, Subcommittee on Military Installations and Facilities, House Committee on Armed Services; the Secretaries of Defense, Army, Air Force, and Navy; and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. We will make copies available to others on request.

As you know, 31 U.S.C. 720 requires the head of a federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs and the House Committee on Government Operations no later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report.

Please contact me on (202) 275-3990 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix I.

Sincerely yours,



Paul L. Jones
Director, Defense Force Management Issues

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