


GAO
 Accountability • Integrity • Reliability
Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-147](#), a report to the Honorable John D. Dingell, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Over 15 million acres in the United States are suspected of being, or known to be, contaminated with military munitions. These sites include ranges on closing military installations, closed ranges on active installations, and formerly used defense sites. Under the Defense Environmental Restoration Program, established in 1986, the Department of Defense (DOD) must identify, assess, and clean up military munitions contamination at these sites. DOD estimates these activities will cost from \$8 billion to \$35 billion. Because of the magnitude of DOD's cleanup effort, both in terms of cost and affected acreage, as well as the significant public safety, health, and environmental risks that military munitions may pose, you asked us to evaluate (1) DOD's progress in implementing its program to identify, assess, and clean up military munitions sites and (2) DOD's plans to clean up remaining sites in the future.

What GAO Recommends

We are recommending that DOD develop a comprehensive approach by revising its plan to (1) establish deadlines for completing its site inventory and initial evaluations, (2) reassess the timetable proposed for completing its risk assessment reevaluations, and (3) establish service-specific targets. We are also recommending that after DOD revises its plan, it should work with the Congress to develop budget proposals that will allow timely completion of cleanup activities.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-147.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Anu K. Mittal at (202) 512-3841 or mittala@gao.gov.

MILITARY MUNITIONS

DOD Needs to Develop a Comprehensive Approach for Cleaning Up Contaminated Sites

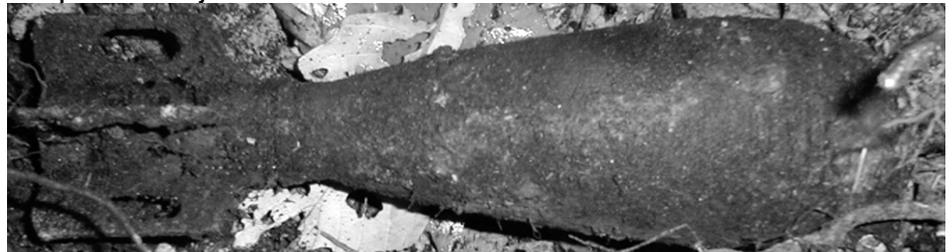
What GAO Found

DOD has made limited progress in its program to identify, assess, and clean up sites that may be contaminated with military munitions. While DOD had identified 2,307 potentially contaminated sites as of September 2002, DOD officials said that they continue to identify additional sites and are not likely to have a firm inventory for several years. Of the identified sites, DOD had initially determined that 362 sites required no further study or cleanup action because it found little or no evidence of military munitions. For 1,387 sites, DOD either has not begun or not completed its initial evaluation or determined that further study is needed. DOD has completed its assessment of 558 sites, finding that 475 of these required no cleanup action. The remaining 83 sites required some cleanup action, of which DOD has completed 23.

DOD does not yet have a complete and viable plan for cleaning up military munitions at remaining potentially contaminated sites. DOD's plan is lacking in several respects, including the following:

- Essential data for DOD's plan may take years to develop. Not all the potential sites have been identified, and DOD has set no deadline for doing so. Also, DOD intends to use a new procedure to assign a relative priority for the remaining 1,387 sites, but it will not complete the reassessments until 2012. Until these are done, DOD cannot be assured that it is using its limited resources to clean up the riskiest sites first.
- DOD's plan relies on preliminary cost estimates that can change greatly and the reallocation of funds that may not be available. For example, the Air Force used estimated, not actual, acreage to create its cost estimates, limiting the estimate's reliability and DOD's ability to plan and budget cleanup for these sites. Also, DOD expects additional funds will become available for munitions cleanup as other DOD hazardous waste cleanup efforts are completed. However, some of these efforts are behind schedule; therefore, funds may not become available as anticipated.
- DOD's plan does not contain goals or measures for site assessment and cleanup. DOD recently established a working group tasked with developing agencywide program goals and performance measures, but not service-specific targets, limiting DOD's ability to ensure that the services are making progress in cleaning the potentially contaminated sites and achieving the overall goals of the program as planned.

Unexploded Military Munition



Source: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.