

## Why GAO Did This Study

DOD reported in January 2019 that critical installations are at risk of water scarcity—that is, of not having sufficient water available to meet their mission needs. According to military department officials, installations depend on water for activities such as training, weapons testing, fire suppression, and sanitation. In its 2018 *Fourth National Climate Assessment*, the U.S. Global Change Research Program reported that warming temperatures will continue to cause worsening droughts and the decline of surface water quality.

Senate Report 115-262 included a provision for GAO to review DOD’s identified or potential effects of water scarcity. For this report, GAO evaluated the extent to which DOD has assurance that it is using reliable information to identify installations at risk of water scarcity. GAO analyzed DOD’s six assessments conducted from April 2017 through January 2019 to identify installations at risk of water scarcity and compared the assessments with five leading practices for identifying and analyzing water scarcity. GAO also interviewed officials from OSD and the military departments and contacted a nongeneralizable sample of 17 installations identified in OSD’s assessments to reflect diversity in military service, mission, and water scarcity.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Office of the Secretary of Defense assess whether it should conduct a coordinated, department-wide assessment aligned with leading practices or rely on military department assessments to determine which DOD installations are at risk of water scarcity. DOD concurred with GAO’s recommendation.

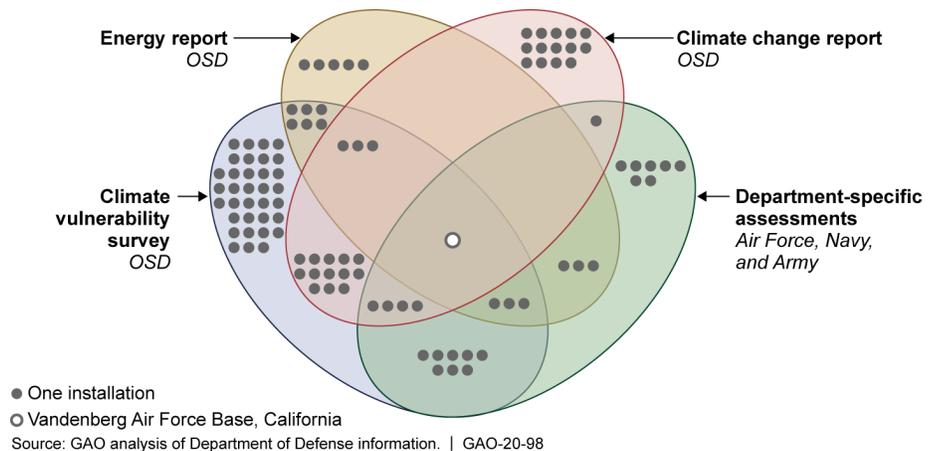
# WATER SCARCITY

## DOD Has Not Always Followed Leading Practices to Identify At-Risk Installations

### What GAO Found

GAO found that the Department of Defense (DOD) does not have assurance that it is using reliable information regarding which installations are at risk for water scarcity. When comparing the results of six Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and military department assessments on installations vulnerable to water scarcity, GAO found that they varied markedly, raising questions about their quality and about which source of information DOD is using to determine which installations are vulnerable to water scarcity (see figure).

**Installations Identified in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Military Department Assessments as Being at Risk of Water Scarcity**



An OSD official stated that the three OSD-produced assessments provided the best information available on which installations are at risk of water scarcity. However, GAO found that these assessments did not reflect four of five leading practices for identifying and analyzing water scarcity—practices that contribute to a reliable assessment of water availability. Specifically, OSD did not always (1) identify current water availability, (2) identify future water availability, (3) take into account all sources of water, or (4) precisely identify locations. Further, although GAO found that the three military department assessments aligned with all leading practices, OSD officials disagreed as to whether these assessments can and should be used to identify installations at risk of water scarcity across the defense enterprise. Until OSD resolves the question as to whether it should conduct a department-wide assessment of installations that aligns with leading practices or whether it should rely on the military department assessments, the department will not have assurance that it is using reliable information to assess water scarcity.