



Highlights of [GAO-05-164](#), a report to congressional committees

NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Contractors' Strategies to Recruit and Retain a Critically Skilled Workforce Are Generally Effective

Why GAO Did This Study

Responsibility for ensuring the safety and reliability of the nuclear weapons stockpile rests upon a cadre of workers at eight contractor-operated National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) weapons facilities. Many of these workers—including scientists, engineers, and technicians—have “critical” skills needed to maintain the stockpile. About 37 percent of these workers are at or near retirement age, raising concern about whether these specialists will have time to pass on their knowledge and expertise to new recruits. In this context, you asked us to (1) describe the approaches that NNSA, its contractors, and organizations with similar workforces are using to recruit and retain critically skilled workers; (2) assess the extent to which these approaches have been effective; and (3) describe any remaining challenges, strategies to mitigate these challenges, and the similarity of these challenges and strategies to those of organizations with comparable workforces.

We provided NNSA with a draft of this report for its review and comment. In oral comments, NNSA agreed with the report.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-164.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robin Nazzaro at 202-512-6246 or nazzaror@gao.gov.

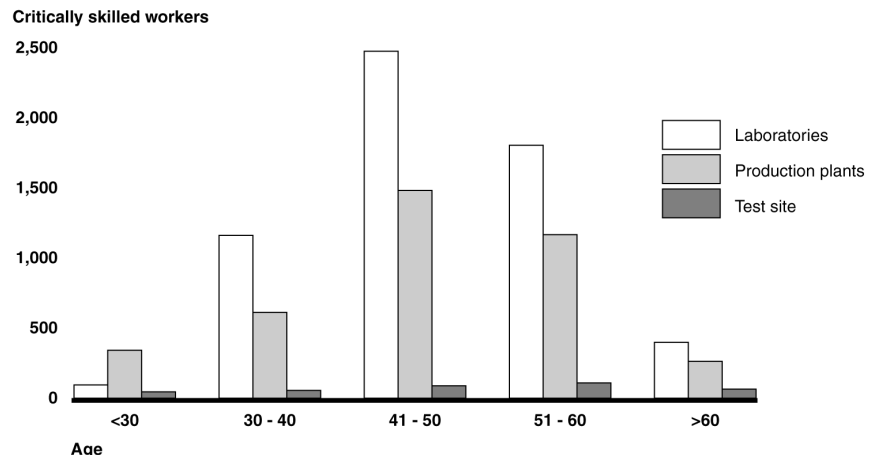
What GAO Found

NNSA contractors have each developed and implemented a multifaceted approach to recruit and retain critically skilled workers. These approaches are similar to those used by six organizations with comparable workforces with whom GAO spoke and consist of combinations of activities tailored to meet the specific needs of each facility. These activities include offering internships and providing knowledge transfer opportunities. NNSA has supported the contractors' efforts by, for example, providing additional funding to help them recruit workers to fill critically skilled positions.

The efforts of NNSA's contractors to recruit and retain a critically skilled workforce have been generally effective. The contractors' fiscal year 2000 through 2003 data show that all eight facilities have maintained the critically skilled workforce needed to fulfill its current mission. In addition, our review of the workforce planning processes of each facility shows that they have incorporated, to varying degrees, the five principles GAO has identified as essential to strategic workforce planning. Finally, most of the program managers GAO spoke with believe their facilities have, and are well poised to maintain, the critically skilled workforce needed to fulfill their mission.

NNSA contractors and the six organizations with comparable workforces face ongoing challenges in recruiting and retaining a critically skilled workforce, but are using a number of similar strategies to mitigate most of these challenges. These challenges include the amount of time it takes new staff to obtain security clearances and a shrinking pool of technically trained potential employees. Beyond such identifiable challenges, NNSA contractors also face future uncertainties, such as the possibility that a new contractor might be awarded the contract and shifts in their mission that could affect their ability to recruit and retain a critically skilled workforce in the future.

Age Distribution of Critically Skilled Workers at NNSA Nuclear Weapons Facilities, Fiscal Year 2003



Source: NNSA.