



Highlights of [GAO-09-1019T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) and other executive agencies increasingly deploy civilians in support of contingency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Prior GAO reports show that the use of deployed civilians has raised questions about the potential for differences in policies on compensation and medical benefits. When these civilians are deployed and serve side by side, differences in compensation or medical benefits may become more apparent and could adversely impact morale.

This statement is based on GAO's June 2009 congressionally requested report, which compared agency policies and identified any issues in policy or implementation regarding (1) compensation, (2) medical benefits, and (3) identification and tracking of deployed civilians. GAO reviewed laws, agency policies and guidance; interviewed responsible officials at the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the six selected agencies, including DOD and State; reviewed workers' compensation claims filed by deployed civilians with the Department of Labor from January 1, 2006 through April 30, 2008; and conducted a survey of deployed civilians. GAO made ten recommendations for agencies to take actions such as reviewing compensation laws and policies, establishing medical screening requirements, and creating mechanisms to assist and track deployed civilians. At the time of this testimony, the agencies were in various stages of taking action.

View [GAO-09-1019T](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Improved Tracking and Additional Actions Needed to Ensure the Timely and Accurate Delivery of Compensation and Medical Benefits to Deployed Civilians

What GAO Found

While policies concerning compensation for deployed civilians are generally comparable, GAO found some issues that affect the amount of compensation—depending on such things as the pay system—and the accuracy, timeliness, and completeness of this compensation. For example, two comparable civilian supervisors who deploy under different pay systems may receive different rates of overtime pay because this rate is set by the employee's pay system and grade/band. While a congressional subcommittee asked OPM to develop a benefits package for all civilians deployed to war zones and recommend enabling legislation, at the time of GAO's review, OPM had not yet done so. Also, implementation of some policies may not always be accurate or timely. For example, GAO estimates that about 40 percent of the deployed civilians in its survey reported experiencing problems with compensation, including danger pay. GAO recommended, among other things, that OPM oversee an agency working group on compensation to address differences and, if necessary, make legislative recommendations. OPM generally concurred with this recommendation.

Although agency policies on medical benefits are similar, GAO found some issues with medical care following deployment, workers' compensation, and post deployment medical screenings that affect the benefits of deployed civilians. Specifically, while DOD allows its treatment facilities to care for non-DOD civilians following deployment in some cases, the circumstances are not clearly defined and some agencies were unaware of DOD's policy. Civilians who deploy also may be eligible for benefits through workers' compensation. GAO's analysis of 188 such claims revealed some significant delays resulting in part from a lack of clarity about the documentation required. Without clear information on what documents to submit, applicants may continue to experience delays. Further, while DOD requires medical screening of civilians before and following deployment, State requires screenings only before deployment. Prior GAO work found that documenting the medical condition of deployed personnel before and following deployment was critical to identifying conditions that may have resulted from deployment. In June 2009, GAO recommended, among other things, that State establish post-deployment screening requirements and that DOD establish procedures to ensure its post-deployment screenings requirements are completed.

Each agency provided GAO with a list of deployed civilians, but none had fully implemented policies to identify and track these civilians. DOD, for example, had procedures to identify and track civilians but concluded that its guidance was not consistently implemented. While the other agencies had some ability to identify and track civilians, some had to manually search their systems. Thus, agencies may lack critical information on the location and movement of personnel, which may hamper their ability to intervene promptly to address emerging health issues. GAO recommended that DOD enforce its tracking requirements and the other five agencies establish tracking procedures. DOD and four agencies concurred with the recommendations; one agency did not.