

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-434](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Nuclear weapons are an essential part of the nation's defense strategy, and NNSA is charged with performing key activities in support of this strategy. Like other agencies, however, NNSA is being asked to find ways to operate more efficiently and reduce costs.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 mandated that NNSA submit a report to congressional defense committees that, among other things, includes an assessment of the role of the nuclear security complex sites, as well as opportunities for efficiencies at these sites and how these efficiencies may contribute to cost savings and help strengthen safety and security. The act required that NNSA's report include certain topics and mandated that GAO assess the report submitted by NNSA. This report evaluates the extent to which the NNSA report (1) assessed the role of nuclear security complex sites in supporting key NNSA activities and (2) identified opportunities for efficiencies and cost savings within the nuclear security complex. GAO analyzed NNSA's statutory reporting requirements, the agency's report to congressional committees and supporting documentation, and interviewed NNSA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that, when reporting on efficiencies and cost savings in the future, NNSA establish a methodology for estimating the savings derived from potential efficiencies and track savings resulting from efforts. NNSA disagreed, stating that the act did not require, as GAO recommends, that efficiencies be linked to cost savings. GAO believes its recommendation remains valid.

View [GAO-14-434](#). For more information, contact David C. Trimble at (202) 512-3841 or trimbled@gao.gov.

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NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Agency Report to Congress on Potential Efficiencies Does Not Include Key Information

What GAO Found

The National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) report to congressional defense committees describes, but does not assess, the role of the nuclear security complex sites. The act required that NNSA's report include an assessment of the role of the nuclear security complex sites in supporting a safe, secure, and reliable nuclear deterrent; reductions in the nuclear stockpile; and the nuclear nonproliferation efforts of the nation—which GAO refers to in this report as key NNSA activities. NNSA's report does not include such an assessment. Instead, the report describes activities such as certifying annually that the nuclear weapons stockpile is safe, secure, and reliable. NNSA officials told GAO that a prior 2008 report that assessed the role of the nuclear security complex is still valid and said that they did not think the act required them to update it. GAO notes, however, that NNSA's report to Congress does not cite the 2008 report as support for its assessment and provides no other information that would constitute an assessment. NNSA officials said that a new analysis of the role of the nuclear security complex sites may be warranted in the future if circumstances change. Officials acknowledged that characteristics of some major projects—such as the Chemistry and Metallurgical Research Replacement Nuclear Facility in New Mexico—have changed recently due to technical and fiscal challenges, but that such changes do not alter the fundamental role each site plays.

NNSA's report to congressional defense committees identified seven opportunities for efficiency, but it did not, as required by the act, provide an assessment of how these efficiencies could contribute to cost savings or strengthening safety and security. For example, NNSA's report cites the establishment of two new offices—the Office of Acquisition and Project Management in 2011 and the Office of Infrastructure and Operations in 2013—as efficiency opportunities but does not provide an assessment of how these offices have contributed or will contribute to cost savings or improved safety and security. In addition, some efficiency opportunities noted in NNSA's report—such as the capabilities provided by the new Uranium Processing Facility at the Y-12 National Security Complex—involve projects or strategies that GAO has previously reported face challenges, which, if not addressed, may impact NNSA's ability both to achieve cost savings and strengthen safety and security. Key principles for preparing savings estimates include a methodology that identifies the basis of any assumptions included in the savings estimates and a process for tracking actual savings. Such a methodology could help ensure that savings from proposed efficiencies can be achieved. Because NNSA did not assess how these efficiencies would lead to savings, however, it is not clear whether any cost savings will result.