

DEFENSE RESEARCH

Improved Management of DOD's Technical Corrosion Collaboration Program Needed

Why GAO Did This Study

According to DOD, corrosion can significantly affect maintenance cost, service life of equipment, and military readiness by diminishing the operations of critical systems and creating safety hazards. Pursuant to Section 2228 of Title 10 of the U.S. Code, DOD's Corrosion Office is responsible for prevention and mitigation of corrosion of military equipment and infrastructure. To help identify technology to prevent or mitigate corrosion and educate personnel about corrosion prevention and control, DOD funds universities and military labs in the TCC program.

GAO was asked to review DOD's TCC program and its goals. In this report, GAO addressed the extent to which DOD (1) has established procedures for managing the TCC program, (2) can provide information on the amount of funds spent on the program to date, and (3) has established goals for the TCC program and transitioned demonstrated results from projects to military departments. GAO reviewed DOD policies and plans and met with DOD corrosion officials and TCC participants.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends five actions to improve DOD's management of the TCC program. DOD partially agreed with two actions: to document procedures to select and approve labs, and to track and maintain accurate funding data. DOD did not agree with three recommendations to document procedures to select and approve projects, and to establish a process to transition project results to the military departments. GAO believes that these recommendations remain valid.

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What GAO Found

The Department of Defense's (DOD) Office of Corrosion Policy and Oversight (Corrosion Office) has documented some, but not all, key procedures for the Technical Corrosion Collaboration (TCC) program. For civilian institutions, the Corrosion Office documented procedures for selecting projects, but has not done so for approving these projects. In addition, for military academic institutions, the office has not documented procedures for selecting and approving projects. Corrosion Office officials stated that procedures for some aspects of the TCC program are not documented because the program is still evolving and they would like flexibility to enable innovation in determining how to manage the program. However, without fully documenting its decision-making procedures for selecting and approving projects, the Corrosion Office cannot demonstrate how projects were selected and approved for the TCC program.

Corrosion Office officials provided data on the amount of funds spent on the TCC program for fiscal years 2008 through 2013, but in some cases the data were not readily available and were inconsistent for the same time frame. As a result, it is unclear what the Corrosion Office has spent on the TCC program. Section 2228 requires the Corrosion Office to include a description of the amount of funds used for the TCC program in its annual corrosion budget report to Congress. However, because the Corrosion Office does not track and maintain accurate records, it is unable to determine the amount of funds spent. In the absence of fully documented funding data that are readily available for examination, Corrosion Office officials cannot ensure that they will accurately account for and report TCC costs in the annual budget report to Congress.

DOD has set goals for the TCC program, but has not developed a process to transition demonstrated results from projects to military departments. According to the *DOD Corrosion Prevention and Mitigation Strategic Plan*, TCC program goals are to: (1) develop individuals with education, training, and experience who will form the future core of the technical community within DOD and private industry; and (2) produce solutions that will reduce the effect of corrosion on DOD infrastructure and weapon systems. To track the goal of developing people, the Corrosion Office cited, among other things, the research papers that have been produced as a result of the TCC program. Section 2228 requires that the Corrosion Office coordinate a research and development program that includes a plan for the transition of new corrosion-prevention technologies to the military departments. To track the goal to produce solutions that will reduce corrosion, the Corrosion Office monitors TCC projects' results; however, the office has not established a process to transition demonstrated results of the research projects to the military departments. Corrosion Office officials stated that it is difficult to transition results because outputs of TCC research are in the early stages of technology evolution and thus are not mature enough to be used by the military departments. Therefore, Corrosion Office officials acknowledge the need to establish a process to transition TCC results to the military departments. Until the Corrosion Office establishes a process to study and determine what, if any, TCC results could transition to the military departments, DOD will not be able to demonstrate the success of the TCC program and the extent to which TCC results are helping to prevent or mitigate corrosion.