

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-626](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The sustained readiness and availability of the Army's reserve component forces (the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard) is critical to U.S. national defense. These soldiers comprise over half of the Army's total force and their availability is key, as the Army plans to reduce its number of soldiers over the next several years.

The House Report accompanying the Fiscal Year 2015 National Defense Authorization Act included a provision for GAO to review issues related to the non-availability of soldiers in the Army reserve components. In this report GAO examined, among other things, the extent to which the Army reserve components (1) have complete, accurate, and timely soldier information to report soldiers' non-availability rates and (2) verify in a timely manner whether soldiers' injuries and illnesses are service-connected, as delays can affect soldier non-availability.

GAO reviewed Army regulations and analyzed soldier non-availability data for fiscal years 2012-14; however, due to concerns with data reliability, GAO focused its analysis on January 2015.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Army reserve components increase the scope and frequency of data quality reviews; improve data system updates of availability-related information; reduce the backlog of investigations of service-connected injuries and illnesses; and issue revised guidance that addresses causes for the delays. In written comments, DOD agreed with the recommendations and provided additional comments for context.

View [GAO-15-626](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov

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ARMY RESERVE COMPONENTS

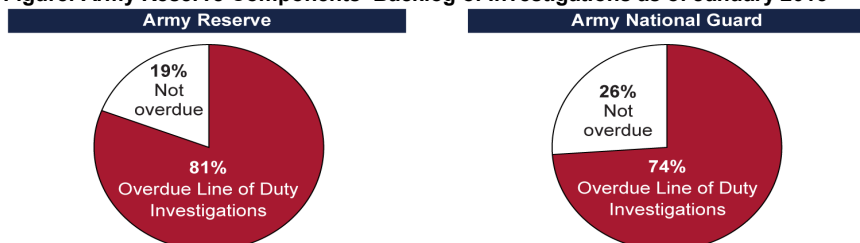
Improvements Needed to Data Quality and Management Procedures to Better Report Soldier Availability

What GAO Found

The Army reserve components do not have complete, accurate, and timely information to report soldiers' non-availability rates. In January 2015, the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard reported overall non-availability rates of 22 and 21 percent, respectively. However, GAO analyzed a limited number of medical, training, and administrative availability-related variables for all 85,000 soldiers in six units during this time period and identified more than 3,800 examples of soldiers' records that were inaccurate, incomplete, or inconsistent. For example, GAO identified soldiers who were listed as available but were incarcerated or had a medically limiting condition. A comprehensive analysis could reveal additional inaccuracies. While the Army reserve component commands and some units perform some data quality reviews to identify and correct discrepancies within the multiple data systems that they rely on for availability data, these reviews examine a limited scope of availability-related variables and are performed infrequently. For example, one system generates a report that identifies a small number of problematic variables, but only reports this information quarterly. Further, it does not provide information specific enough to correct individual problems or cover the full range of variables contributing to inaccurate data. Furthermore, the multiple systems do not interface with each other in a way to allow for timely updates of inconsistent availability information. Without an increase in the scope and frequency of data quality reviews, and improvements to systems to update information in a timely manner, the Army reserve components' availability data will continue to be inaccurate.

The Army reserve components do not verify in a timely manner whether soldiers' injuries or illnesses are service-connected (i.e., occurred in the line of duty) which could lengthen the time that some soldiers are classified as non-available. In January 2015, 81 percent of Army Reserve and 74 percent of the Army National Guard investigations of soldiers' injuries and illnesses were overdue per Army regulation. However, the Army does not have a plan to reduce the existing backlog which officials said is caused in part by soldiers not complying with information requests during investigations. The Army is updating its program guidance to address some of the causes cited for these delays, but as of June 2015, officials stated that the revised regulation had not been issued and did not address soldier noncompliance.

Figure: Army Reserve Components' Backlog of Investigations as of January 2015



Source: GAO analysis of Army Reserve and Army National Guard data. | GAO-15-626

Note: Overdue means the investigation has been in process longer than the standard processing time as prescribed by Army Regulation 600-8-4.