

A report to the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate

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What GAO Found

Natural disasters at military installations have resulted in significant costs and damages since 2015, but the Department of Defense (DOD) has not comprehensively tracked data related to those costs. In 2024, DOD began an effort to track the effects of extreme weather at military installations. However, GAO identified gaps in the scope of DOD’s data collection and its ability to collect complete and accurate data on disaster recovery costs. Specifically, DOD’s data collection is limited to the effects of extreme weather, which does not include the full scope of natural disasters, including seismic events such as earthquakes. Also, data DOD collects on the cost of extreme weather at installations may be inaccurate or incomplete in some cases, in part due to the timing of when installations are expected to report the information. Expanding the scope of its data collection to include all types of natural disasters and establishing a process to ensure cost data are complete and accurate can improve DOD’s ability to anticipate future disaster recovery needs.

Figure: Examples of Natural Disasters at Military Installations



Source: U.S. Army/Storm Damage Initial Assessment Team, U.S. Navy/Petty Officer First Class Arthurgwain L. Marquez, and U.S. Air Force/Master Sergeant Ryan Conroy (photos left to right). | GAO-26-107786

DOD has taken steps to increase installations’ disaster resilience—including implementing resilience improvements at the 12 installations GAO examined—but gaps in planning may limit these efforts. GAO identified some instances when installations were unable to pursue resilience improvements due to not having necessary data or sufficient funding. Installations are working to implement a statutory requirement to include resilience information as part of their master plans. This includes the identification of current and future risks and ongoing or planned projects to mitigate those risks. DOD policy reflects this requirement and addresses how resilience should be incorporated into construction projects, such as by adhering to Unified Facilities Criteria (DOD’s standards for design and construction of facilities). However, existing DOD and military department guidance does not address how installations should use the master plan resilience information when recovering from a disaster. By including such information in guidance, the military departments can help ensure that installations affected by disasters are better able to incorporate resilience improvements while quickly restoring essential capabilities.

Why GAO Did This Study

Extreme weather and natural disasters have resulted in billions of dollars of damages to military installations over the past decade. Such damages can affect DOD’s ability to execute its mission and disrupt installation resources that support service members and their families.

Senate Report 118-58, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, includes a provision for GAO to assess DOD’s recovery from natural disasters at military installations. GAO examined the extent to which DOD has (1) tracked costs and damages associated with natural disasters since 2015 and (2) increased resilience of selected installations affected by natural disasters.

GAO reviewed documentation and interviewed officials from a non-generalizable sample of 12 installations on disaster damages and resilience improvement efforts and conducted in-person site visits at three of these installations. GAO analyzed annual and supplemental appropriations to identify funds designated for disaster recovery. GAO also reviewed documentation and interviewed DOD and military department officials related to installations’ recovery efforts and collection of related data.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations, including that DOD improve its efforts to collect data on the effects of extreme weather at installations and that the military departments issue guidance to enhance the use of resilience information in installation master plans. DOD concurred with GAO’s recommendations.