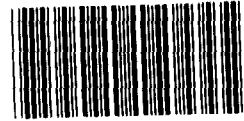


National Security and
International Affairs Division

B-248196

May 15, 1992

The Honorable Richard B. Cheney
The Secretary of Defense

146631

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We have completed our review of the Department of Defense's (DOD's) Personnel Reliability Program (PRP), the principal means the Department uses to assure that employees assigned to nuclear-related duties are reliable and trustworthy. The program requires individuals assigned to nuclear weapon duties to be assessed for their ability to meet reliability standards for emotional stability, judgment, dependability, social adjustment, and attitude. Our objective was to examine the PRP process and identify areas where improvements could be made to further strengthen the program.

After visiting four nuclear-capable activities, we discussed issues we had identified with officials in the Office of the Secretary. They told us they were revising the Department's directive that governed the program. Therefore, we decided not to conduct further field work but to report to you on the issues we identified at the four sites and how they are addressed in the revised directive.

Our limited review indicated several areas where program management could be improved to provide DOD with better assurance that employees assigned to nuclear-related duties are reliable and trustworthy. Most of the following improvements were also identified by a contractor in 1989.

- A formal training program for PRP monitors would better assure they were properly obtaining and considering appropriate information on employees.
- More specific screening criteria would help monitors evaluate an employee's reliability.
- More emphasis on peer-reporting would better assure that officials were aware of behaviors that might lead them to question an employee's reliability.

The revised directive addresses each of these issues. If properly implemented, it should strengthen the program.

BACKGROUND

PRP is designed to ensure the highest possible standards of individual reliability and prevent potentially unreliable individuals from working on or near nuclear weapons. It continuously evaluates the loyalty, integrity, reliability, and discretion of individuals having or controlling access to nuclear weapons or their components. Established in the early 1960s, PRP is one of several DOD programs to ensure the safety and well-being of nuclear weapons. In 1990, PRP involved about 66,500 persons, including 1,800 civilians. The number of personnel serving in PRP should decrease significantly over the next few years because of significant cutbacks in the nuclear weapons programs that are in process or under consideration by DOD.

At each military activity PRP is the responsibility of the activity commander, who is aided by PRP certifying officer(s), PRP monitors, and medical personnel. PRP operates under DOD and service guidance at each military activity handling nuclear weapons. Generally, PRP involves two processes--initial screening of individuals for entry into the program, and continuous evaluation of their suitability to perform nuclear weapon duties. Applicants for either critical or controlled nuclear positions¹, must pass a (1) personal security investigation, (2) screening process that evaluates their physical, medical, and psychological behavior, if necessary, (3) personal interview and briefing of the program's significance by a certifying official, and (4) formal certification process into the program.

According to the current PRP directive, an updated reinvestigation is required if the personnel security information is over 5 years old and the individual is being screened for initial entry into PRP or has not been in a PRP assignment in the last 5 years. In addition, a new investigation is required for interrupted service in excess

¹Individuals in critical positions have access to and technical knowledge of nuclear weapon systems. Those in controlled positions have access to, but no technical knowledge of, nuclear weapons.

of 2 years, in which case the investigation must be completed prior to assignment in PRP.

Should personal circumstances arise that could diminish an individual's suitability to perform nuclear weapon duties, PRP officials have the authority to revoke their certification, either temporarily or permanently, depending upon the seriousness of the problem. Denial or revocation of an individual's certification to PRP is not punitive, and occurs independent of any disciplinary measures. The program encourages self-reporting for people to temporarily remove themselves from such duties if an emotional, stressful or medical condition develops which could affect judgment or concentration. When this occurs, the certifying official, and, if necessary a competent medical authority, must approve the individual's suitability for resuming nuclear duties. In addition to temporary suspension, for the past several years less than 4 percent of PRP personnel per year were permanently decertified from the program. The various reasons for permanent removal include substance abuse, negligence, conviction of a serious offense, and poor physical or mental condition.

NEED FOR FORMAL TRAINING

The PRP monitor administers the program and serves as a liaison to local information sources on individuals serving in PRP positions (hospitals, mental health clinics, substance abuse clinics, personnel offices, etc.). Since much of the information comes from these entities, the monitor's knowledge of PRP responsibilities and ability to deliver complete and timely information to the certifying official is critical in determining an individual's suitability for serving in nuclear weapon duties.

At some sites we visited, no formal training was available for the activity monitors. However, at one site the importance of the monitor was emphasized in monthly training sessions and quarterly meetings on PRP matters involving high-level officials. For example, the Air Force's Strategic Air Command requires the base monitors to ensure PRP training is provided to unit commanders, unit monitors, and the monitors of base support activities. In addition, semiannual refresher training for medical and dental personnel is required to cover current PRP procedures and any discrepancies noted during inspections.

The 1989 study also reported that little formal training is offered to those who administer the program on a day-to-day basis and most training is on-the-job. The study recommended developing a formal standardized training program in PRP administrative procedures for all management personnel.

DOD's draft PRP directive addresses this training shortcoming by requiring the services to ensure that reviewing and certifying officials, PRP monitors, and medical authorities receive formal training concerning their PRP management and oversight responsibilities.

NEED TO ESTABLISH MORE
SPECIFIC SCREENING CRITERIA

The current directive requires certifying officials to judge whether individuals' behaviors may have adversely affected their reliability. However, the directive does not provide much guidance to the officials in terms of how recent the behavior should have been exhibited or how serious it should have been to disqualify an individual from serving in a nuclear-related position.

During our review of personnel and medical records at three activities, we found cases where individuals had been certified for nuclear-related positions despite evidence that they had been convicted for driving while intoxicated or they had admitted to pre-service drug use. For example, at one activity, of the 54 personnel records we reviewed, we found 6 individuals with pre-service drug use. Of those six, five had identified pre-service use of marijuana. In the last case, an individual's personnel records showed illegal pre-service drug use without stating the type, frequency, or duration. However, the medical files documented the individual had admitted during two interviews (April 1989 and May 1990) using marijuana 20 to 30 times in high school (from 1979 to 1981). The folders did not document the basis for the certifying officials decision to not consider these behaviors serious enough to disqualify the individuals.

DOD has guidance in other directives to help officials assess how prior questionable behavior should influence a decision to grant general security clearances. For example, regarding alcohol abuse, the guidance states that a diagnosis of alcoholism or alcohol dependence by a credentialed authority is potentially disqualifying. The

guidance also describes "mitigating factors" which may "clarify, explain, refute, negate, or otherwise lessen the seriousness of the potentially disqualifying information". Concerning the alcoholism, the guidance suggests that successful completion of a rehabilitation program might mitigate the certifying official's concerns.

The revised PRP directive will provide more specific criteria to help certifying officials judge whether individual's behavior should disqualify them for nuclear-related positions. The directive expands the alcoholism or alcohol dependence mitigating factors by requiring successful completion of a rehabilitation program, regular and frequent participation in meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous or a similar organization, and total abstention from alcohol. The guidance for pre-service experimental drug use is limited to marijuana type substances only, and for a total of no more than six times. A competent medical authority must provide an evaluation of the individual's physical capability and mental reliability to perform PRP duties. Any potentially disqualifying information and basis for PRP determinations needs to be documented and retained.

NEED TO EMPHASIZE PEER-REPORTING

During our review, we were told by the Assistant for Nuclear Matters in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence that peer-reporting was rarely a factor in alerting supervisors to potential problems, and that the current PRP directive does not require such reporting. In addition, he stated the revision to the PRP directive will address this issue by making individuals in the program aware of their obligations to report peers' unreliable behavior.

Two recent cases reported on by the Navy in August 1991 illustrate the need to address peer reporting. In one case, an individual committed suicide while on guard duty. Fellow servicemen interviewed after the individual's death stated they did not report the individual's discussion of suicide and reincarnation to his superiors because the individual was always "joking around". In the other case, an individual was known by his peers to carry an unauthorized handgun, drink excessively, and talk about not having a problem killing anyone. This information did not reach PRP supervisors and the individual killed three

people before committing suicide. In this case, the Navy investigation concluded that the PRP continuing evaluation process clearly failed to operate properly. Also, the Navy noted with serious concern the reluctance of peers to inform on the behavior of fellow servicemen and recommended that PRP indoctrination and training be revised to emphasize that certain types of behavior must be brought to the attention of appropriate command officials.

The DOD draft PRP directive provides that individuals shall be made aware of how problems, concerns, and circumstances may reduce individual's effectiveness and impair capability or reliability. The directive provides that each person assigned to PRP duties has an obligation to report any behavior or circumstance of others which appear to reflect a degradation in performance and reliability. Failure to report such behavior may cast doubt on an individual's own reliability to serve in a PRP position.

NEED FOR PERIODIC REINVESTIGATIONS

We found an inconsistency among the services on the use of periodic reinvestigations in support of the PRP. The Army is the only service requiring PRP reinvestigations every 5 years for both military and civilian personnel in critical positions. The Air Force requires PRP reinvestigations only for its critical military personnel, and the Navy does not have a reinvestigation requirement. When periodic reinvestigations are not used, the services rely on the continuous screening process at the activity to evaluate an individual's physical and psychological behavior.

The 1989 study recommended the need for all PRP members to be given a background investigation with interview and periodic reinvestigations.

In October 1991, the President issued National Security Directive 63, requiring single-scope background investigations for individuals needing access to top secret/national security information. This investigation will include a national agency check, subject interview, education and employment verification, local agency check, and credit check. In addition, the directive requires a reinvestigation of the individual every 5 years. DOD's draft PRP directive requires personnel serving in critical PRP positions to have an initial single-scope background investigation and periodic reinvestigation every 5 years in accordance with the National Security Directive

63. For those personnel in controlled PRP positions, the draft PRP directive requires, at a minimum, a national agency check, subject interview, and credit check. The directive also requires a similar reinvestigation of those individuals every 5 years.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We interviewed officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the three services to identify and evaluate the PRP procedures and practices used to ensure only reliable and trustworthy individuals are assigned to nuclear weapon duties. In addition, we talked to Defense Nuclear Agency (DNA) officials about their duties associated with PRP. In addition, we reviewed summary results of DNA field inspections concerning nuclear capable units compliance with PRP regulations. We reviewed DOD Directives, Army and Air Force regulations and supplements, and Navy instructions setting forth the regulations on PRP. Furthermore, we reviewed historical records of the types of reasons individuals are being permanently decertified from the program.

We performed work at four nuclear capable activities covering each service. At these installations, we talked with commanding officers, certifying officers, medical personnel, base monitors, and support/unit monitors, to determine policies, procedures, and practices associated with PRP. We discussed cases of individuals temporarily or permanently decertified from the program with officials at the activities visited. In addition, we randomly selected personnel and medical folders at three of the four activities to review the screening and on-going review process of PRP participants.

We met with Defense Personnel Security Research and Education Center officials to discuss their duties and responsibilities. We obtained and reviewed copies of their personnel security reports. In addition, we met with Naval Investigative Service officials to obtain the Navy's August 1991 report of three incidents that occurred in 1989 with individuals serving in the PRP.

We discussed the issues presented in this report with the Assistant for Nuclear Matters in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence, who agreed with the issues but suggested some clarifying statements that have

B-248196

been incorporated in the report where appropriate. Our work was performed between November 1990 and February 1992 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Please contact me at (202) 275-6504 if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Major contributors to this report are listed in enclosure I.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martin M. Ferber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Martin M Ferber
Director, Navy Issues

Major Contributors to This Report

National Security and International Affairs Division, Washington,
D.C.

Norman J. Rabkin, Associate Director
Bernard D. Easton, Assistant Director

Norfolk Regional Office

Paul A. Latta, Regional Management Representative
Robert L. Coleman, Evaluator-in-Charge
Ruth M. Winchester, Site Senior

(394397)