

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-151](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The environmental cleanup of bases closed under the BRAC process has historically been an impediment to the expeditious transfer of unneeded property to other federal and nonfederal parties. While DOD is obligated to ensure that former installation property is cleaned up to a level that is protective of human health and the environment, the cleanup process can delay redevelopment in communities affected by the BRAC process.

The House Report accompanying the fiscal year 2016 Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill includes a provision for GAO to update its 2007 report on the environmental cleanup and transfer of installations closed under BRAC. This report addresses the extent to which DOD has made progress in: (1) capturing and reporting environmental cleanup costs at installations closed under BRAC and (2) transferring excess property and mitigating any challenges. GAO reviewed DOD guidance, cost data, and property transfer data; visited installations selected from among those with the highest cleanup costs, as well as other factors; and interviewed DOD and service officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that (1) DOD include in future reports to Congress that the cleanup of emerging contaminants will increase cleanup costs, and estimate such costs, and (2) share best practices on mitigating cleanup and property transfer challenges. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-17-151](#). For more information, contact Brian Lepore at (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov.

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MILITARY BASE REALIGNMENTS AND CLOSURES

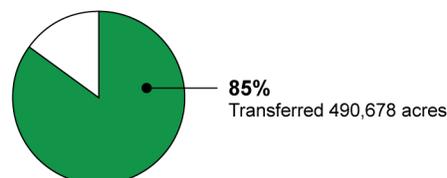
DOD Has Improved Environmental Cleanup Reporting but Should Obtain and Share More Information

What GAO Found

The Department of Defense (DOD) has captured and reported more comprehensive cost information in its environmental cost reporting for installations closed under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process since GAO last reported on the issue in 2007. For example, GAO reported in 2007 that the costs DOD reported for environmental cleanup for installations closed under the 2005 BRAC round were not complete; however, since fiscal year 2009, DOD's annual reports to Congress on environmental cleanup have included cleanup costs for all identified munitions and contaminants. For example, DOD estimated as of September 30, 2015, that it will need about \$3.4 billion to complete environmental cleanup for installations closed under all BRAC rounds, in addition to the approximately \$11.5 billion it has already spent. Despite this improvement in reporting, DOD has not reported to Congress in its annual report that the removal of certain emerging contaminants (i.e., contaminants that have a reasonable possible pathway to enter the environment, present a potential unacceptable human health or environmental risk, and do not have regulatory standards based on peer-reviewed science) will be significant. Without DOD including in its annual report to Congress its best estimate of these increased costs, Congress will not have visibility into the significant costs and efforts associated with the cleanup of emerging contaminants on BRAC installations and therefore will not have the necessary information to make more informed funding decisions.

DOD has used a variety of methods since GAO's 2007 report to continue to make progress in transfers of unneeded BRAC property. For example, as of September 30, 2015, DOD reported that it had transferred about 85 percent of its unneeded property identified in all BRAC rounds (see figure below). Despite this progress, installation officials stated that they continue to face challenges, such as navigating multiple regulatory agencies or disposing of radiological contamination, that increased the time it takes to clean up and transfer property. Installation officials GAO spoke with stated that they periodically reach out to officials at other installations, and across services, for help in learning how to expedite or resolve challenges, but there is no formal mechanism within DOD to capture and share this type of information. Installation officials further stated that a system to capture lessons learned would assist them in this effort. Without a mechanism to record and share lessons learned, installation personnel charged with implementing cleanup efforts are missing opportunities to share information and could duplicate errors made in the past.

Disposition of Unneeded BRAC Acreage, as of September 30, 2015
575,758 unneeded acres



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data. | GAO-17-151