



Highlights of [GAO-05-8](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) believes that it is increasingly likely that an adversary will use nuclear, biological, or chemical (NBC) weapons against U.S. forces. Consequently, DOD doctrine calls for U.S. forces to be sufficiently trained to continue their missions in an NBC-contaminated environment. Given longstanding concerns about the preparedness of DOD's servicemembers in this critical area, GAO has undertaken a body of work covering NBC protective equipment and training. For this review, GAO was asked to determine the following: (1) To what extent do Army and Marine Corps units and personnel attending combat training centers participate in NBC training, and to what extent do these units and personnel perform NBC tasks at the centers to service standards? (2) Do the Army and the Marine Corps report NBC training at the centers in a standardized format that allows the services to identify lessons learned and to do cross-unit and cross-center comparisons?

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that DOD direct the services to (1) establish minimum NBC tasks for units participating in training exercises at the centers and (2) standardize reporting formats on NBC training that occurs at the centers. DOD agreed with the report's findings and recommendations and is now taking the necessary actions for implementation when operating conditions permit.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-8.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov.

CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL DEFENSE

Army and Marine Corps Need to Establish Minimum Training Tasks and Improve Reporting for Combat Training Centers

What GAO Found

Army and Marine Corps combat training centers provide a unique opportunity for units to perform advanced training under conditions that approximate actual combat, thereby enabling units to assess and build upon skills learned at home stations. Although DOD and both services have stressed the importance of including NBC defense in all types of training, they have not established minimum NBC-related tasks for units attending the centers. Commanders sometimes reduce NBC training to focus on other priority areas. As a result, the extent of NBC training actually conducted at these centers varies widely, and some units receive little or none at all. For example, officials at two Army training centers estimated that during fiscal years 2002 and 2003, a typical unit training rotation for a brigade-sized unit—which may include up to 4,000 soldiers—experienced NBC events that required only about 5 percent of these troops to train in full NBC protective clothing for a total of 18 hours or more. For the Marine Corps, no NBC training was conducted during combined arms exercises at its training center for at least 5 years prior to January 2004. The Marine Corps began to introduce NBC training into its combined arms exercises in two rotations that occurred in January and February 2004 but suspended it because of other priorities related to preparing units for ongoing operations. Without minimum NBC tasks, the services often miss the opportunity to use the centers' unique environment to improve units' proficiency in NBC defense.

When Army units did undergo NBC training, observers noted that many units did not perform basic NBC tasks to Army standards. For example, during fiscal years 2002 and 2003, most brigades attending one center did not meet standards for basic NBC tasks such as donning protective gear, seeking overhead shelter, and conducting unmasking procedures. Observers at the Army centers often cited inadequate home-station training as the reason units were not performing basic NBC tasks to standards. Skills in these basic tasks are normally acquired during training at home stations and lay the foundation for acquiring more complex skills associated with large-unit NBC training. When units arrive at the centers with inadequate basic NBC skills, they may not be able to take full advantage of the unique and more complex large-unit NBC training opportunities offered at these centers.

The Army and the Marine Corps do not always report lessons learned on NBC training at the centers in a way that can be used to identify trends over time and allow for cross-unit and cross-center comparisons. Army and Marine Corps doctrine stresses the importance of identifying lessons learned during training to enable tailored training at home stations and elsewhere to reduce the likelihood that similar problems will occur during operations. Because service guidance does not require standardized reporting formats, the training centers submit different types of after-action reports that might or might not mention NBC training. This lack of standardized reporting represents opportunities lost to the services to collect comparable data to identify NBC training trends and lessons learned.