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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-672](#), a report to the Senate and House Committees on Armed Services

Why GAO Did This Study

Following the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, concerns were raised about the security of Iraq's radiological sources. Such sources are used in medicine, industry, and research, but unsecured sources could pose risks of radiation exposure, and terrorists could use them to make "dirty bombs." This report provides information on (1) the readiness of the Department of Defense (DOD) to collect and secure sources, (2) the number of sources DOD collected and secured, (3) U.S. assistance to help regulate sources in Iraq, and (4) the lessons DOD and the Department of Energy learned.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends, among other things, that DOD (1) assess lessons learned from securing sources in Iraq and (2) ensure that advanced planning occurs prior to any future missions. DOD concurred or partially concurred with most of our recommendations and did not concur with two of them, stating that our report focused on the later phase of source recovery and that it accepted our recommendations for that phase. Our recommendations apply to all phases of the effort and we revised some to clarify this. The Department of State provided clarifications regarding U.S. assistance to Iraq and reasons for a delay in approval of export licensing. DOE had no written comments but stated it would work with DOD to help define sources of greatest risk.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-672.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gene Aloise at (202) 512-3841 or aloisee@gao.gov.

RADIOLOGICAL SOURCES IN IRAQ

DOD Should Evaluate Its Source Recovery Effort and Apply Lessons Learned to Future Recovery Missions

What GAO Found

DOD was not ready to collect and secure radiological sources when the war began in March 2003 and for about 6 months thereafter. Before DOD could collect radiological sources, it had to specify criteria for which sources should be collected and how to safely collect them, coordinate within DOD, coordinate assistance from the Department of Energy (DOE), and resolve contract issues. DOD did not issue guidance for collecting and securing sources until July 2003 and did not finalize the terms of the contract to collect sources until September 2003. Until radiological sources could be collected, some sources were looted and scattered, and some troops were diverted from their regular combat duties to guard sources in diverse places.

In June 2004, DOD removed about 1,000 of the 1,400 radiological sources collected in Iraq and sent them to the United States for disposal. DOD left in place approximately 700 additional sources that it had judged were adequately secured and being used properly by Iraqis. According to DOD and Department of State officials, however, the total number of radiological sources in Iraq remains unknown.

The United States assisted in establishing an Iraqi agency to regulate radiological sources. Since June 2004, State and DOE have helped this new agency develop an action plan with assistance from the International Atomic Energy Agency. However, according to State officials, because of uncertainties associated with the continuing formation of the Iraqi government, State will have to monitor Iraqi efforts to ensure the continued growth and success of an independent, competent, and sustainable regulatory authority for the control of radioactive sources and materials.

Both DOD and DOE are considering improvements based on their Iraq experiences. A 2004 study of lessons learned, requested by DOD, recommended that DOD develop the capability to quickly eliminate weapons of mass destruction in hostile environments, but it did not focus on the narrower radiological source mission. In contrast, DOE has contracted for a study to examine lessons from its role in removing radiological sources from Iraq.

Bunker Where DOD Secured Radiological Sources, Tuwaitha, Iraq



Source: DTRA.