



Highlights of [GAO-06-606T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Over the past several years, a serious effort has begun to comprehensively reevaluate how the United States maintains its nuclear deterrent and what the nation's approach should be for transforming its aging nuclear weapons complex. The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), a separately organized agency within the Department of Energy, is responsible for overseeing this weapons complex, which comprises three nuclear weapons design laboratories, four production plants, and the Nevada Test Site.

At the direction of the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board's (SEAB) Nuclear Weapons Complex Infrastructure Task Force issued a report in October 2005 that provided a systematic review of the requirements for the weapons complex for the next 25 years and offered its vision for an agile and responsive weapons complex. GAO was asked to discuss (1) the current actions NNSA is taking to address the SEAB task force's recommendations and (2) the critical steps that will be needed to achieve and sustain a meaningful, cost-effective transformation of the weapons complex.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-606T.

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.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Views on Proposals to Transform the Nuclear Weapons Complex

What GAO Found

The SEAB task force report contained the following five recommendations:

- Immediately begin to modernize the cold war nuclear stockpile by designing a Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW).
- Create a Consolidated Nuclear Production Center (CNPC) that contains a modern set of production facilities in one location.
- Consolidate all weapons-grade material and weapons components at the CNPC.
- Aggressively dismantle the cold war stockpile.
- Create an Office of Transformation to oversee the transformation of the nuclear weapons complex.

NNSA has offered a proposal for transforming the nuclear weapons complex that it believes is responsive to the recommendations in the SEAB task force report. Specifically, NNSA officials noted, they (1) will decide on a design competition for the RRW in November 2006, (2) have requested an increase of over \$15 million in funding for dismantling legacy weapons in fiscal year 2007, and (3) have requested \$15 million in their fiscal year 2007 budget proposal to create an Office of Transformation, among other things. However, NNSA does not support the SEAB task force's recommendation for a CNPC and the accompanying recommendation of consolidating weapons-grade material at the CNPC, primarily because it views these recommendations as too costly. Instead, NNSA has proposed building a consolidated center for processing plutonium, removing weapons-grade material from the three weapons laboratories, and modernizing the remaining production capabilities at their existing locations.

Regardless of the approach chosen, any attempt to change an extremely complex enterprise must be based on solid analysis, careful planning, and effective leadership. GAO has identified the following four actions that, in its view, are critical to successfully transforming the weapons complex:

- The Department of Defense will need to establish clear, long-term requirements for the nuclear stockpile by determining the types and quantities of nuclear weapons needed to provide for our nation's nuclear deterrent.
- After the Department of Defense determines the size and composition of the future stockpile, NNSA will need to develop accurate cost estimates of the proposals for transforming the weapons complex. Current estimates of the costs of transforming the weapons complex contain considerable uncertainty.
- After NNSA selects a proposal based on accurate cost estimates, it will need to develop a clear transformation plan containing measurable milestones so that it can evaluate progress and the Congress can hold it accountable.
- The proposed Office of Transformation must have authority to make and enforce its decisions on transformation and must be held accountable by the Congress for achieving timely and cost-effective results.