



Highlights of [GAO-07-1235T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

As the Department of Defense (DOD) has expanded its involvement in overseas military operations, it has grown increasingly reliant on its federal civilian workforce to support contingency operations. GAO was asked to discuss DOD's (1) force health protection and surveillance policies, (2) medical treatment policies that cover federal civilians while they are deployed to support contingency operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, and (3) differences in special pays and benefits provided to DOD's deployed federal civilian and military personnel.

For this statement, GAO primarily drew on its September 2006 report that addressed these objectives. For its report, GAO analyzed over 3,400 deployment-related records at eight component locations for deployed federal civilians and policies related to defense health care, reviewed claims filed under the Federal Employees' Compensation Act (FECA); and examined major provisions of special pays and disability and death benefits provided to DOD's deployed federal civilians and military personnel.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommended that DOD establish an oversight and quality assurance mechanism to ensure that all components fully comply with its requirements. In 2007, DOD issued a new force health protection and surveillance policy that if effectively implemented will establish such a mechanism.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-07-1235T](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

DOD CIVILIAN PERSONNEL

Medical Policies for Deployed DOD Federal Civilians and Associated Compensation for Those Deployed

What GAO Found

In 2006, GAO reported that DOD had established force health protection and surveillance policies to assess and reduce or prevent health risks for its deployed federal civilians, but it lacked procedures to ensure implementation. GAO's review of over 3,400 deployment records found that components lacked documentation that some federal civilians who deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq had received, among other things, required pre- and post-deployment health assessments and immunizations. Also, DOD lacked centralized data to readily identify its deployed civilians and their movement in theater, thus hindering its efforts to assess the overall effectiveness of its force health protection and surveillance capabilities. GAO noted that until DOD establishes a mechanism to strengthen its oversight of this area, it would not be effectively positioned to ensure compliance with its policies, or the health care of deployed federal civilians.

GAO also reported that DOD had established medical treatment policies for its deployed federal civilians, which provide those who require treatment for injuries or diseases sustained during overseas hostilities with care under the DOD military health system. GAO reviewed a sample of seven workers' compensation claims (out of a universe of 83) filed under FECA by DOD federal civilians who deployed to Iraq. GAO found in three cases where care was initiated in theater that the affected civilians had received treatment in accordance with DOD's policies. In all seven cases, DOD civilians who requested care after returning to the United States had, in accordance with DOD's policies, received medical examinations and/or treatment for their deployment-related injuries or diseases.

GAO reported that DOD provides certain special pays and benefits to its deployed federal civilians, which generally differ in type and/or amount from those provided to deployed military personnel. For example, in cases where injuries are sustained while deployed, both DOD federal civilian and military personnel are eligible to receive government-provided disability benefits; however, the type and amount of the benefits vary, and some are unique to each group. Importantly, continuing challenges with modernizing federal disability programs have been the basis for GAO's designation of this as a high-risk area since 2003. In addition, while the survivors of deceased DOD federal civilian and military personnel generally receive similar types of cash survivor benefits for Social Security, burial expenses, and death gratuity, the comparative amounts of these benefits differ. However, survivors of DOD federal civilians almost always receive lower noncash benefits than military personnel. GAO does not take a position on the adequacy or appropriateness of the special pays and benefits provided to DOD federal civilian and military personnel. Any deliberations on this topic should include an examination of how such changes would affect ensuring adequate and appropriate benefits for those who serve their country, as well as the long-term fiscal well-being of the nation.