



Highlights of [GAO-08-349](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Unreliable real property data has been a long-standing problem for federal landholding agencies. Under the President's real property initiative, agencies are being held accountable for, among other things, improving accuracy of their real property inventory and disposing of unneeded property. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), the fourth largest landholding agency, uses the Real Estate Management Information System (REMIS) for recording its civil works inventory. GAO was asked to determine whether REMIS could provide reliable information on the Corps' civil works land disposals from fiscal years 1996 through 2006. GAO's work involved comparison analyses of REMIS disposal data and other Corps reported disposal data, reviews of Corps' real property policies and guidance, and interviews with Corps officials at headquarters, three divisions, four districts, and the Real Estate Systems National Center (RESNC), which manages REMIS.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Department of Defense (DOD) direct the Corps to improve the reliability of REMIS land disposal data, including maintaining effective internal controls, implementing the data normalization best practice in REMIS, clarifying guidance for processing land disposals in REMIS, and providing REMIS training to users. DOD agreed with GAO's recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-349](#). For more information, contact Terrell G. Dorn, (202) 512-2834, dornt@gao.gov.

FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

Corps of Engineers Needs to Improve the Reliability of Its Real Property Disposal Data

What GAO Found

REMIS did not provide reliable information on the Corps' civil works land disposals from fiscal years 1996 through 2006, or on the land that the Corps owned as of September 30, 2006. Unreliable land disposal data impair the usefulness of REMIS as a record of current inventory and as a source of data that would be useful for budgeting purposes and the strategic management of landholdings. The following contributed to problems with data reliability:

- The Corps did not maintain internal controls over REMIS disposal data. Corps policy held district real estate officials accountable for the reliability of REMIS data, but in two of four districts GAO contacted the individual recording land disposal data was also checking the data against documentation such as titles and transfer forms. Dividing data entry and data checking responsibilities is an essential internal control activity. Corps policy also required division real estate staff to ensure the reliability of REMIS data recorded by their constituent districts, but the three divisions GAO contacted did not review REMIS disposal data.
- The design of the REMIS disposal module, a software application that captures disposal data that users enter, did not follow a best practice, commonly referred to as data normalization. Data normalization organizes data according to rules designed to minimize duplication and redundancies. By not following this best practice, users querying REMIS faced the problem of retrieving inconsistent data. For example, when RESNC officials queried REMIS for specific real property information by district, RESNC officials obtained results that differed from those obtained by district officials.
- Land disposal dates in REMIS were missing or sometimes represented the date when district real estate officials entered the land disposal rather than when the disposal occurred. The vast majority, or about 89 percent, of all disposal records within REMIS did not have disposal dates. When the records contained dates, large numbers of disposals (accounting for about 54,000 acres) in fiscal years 2005 and 2006 had occurred as early as 1955.
- Guidance for processing land disposals in REMIS was unclear. For example, guidance issued in 2004 did not indicate whether some types of disposals, such as transfers to other federal agencies, required a disposal date. New disposal guidance issued in 2007 was also unclear because RESNC, which revised the guidance, did not revise the data entry screens in REMIS. As a result, the guidance and the data entry screens were inconsistent. While the guidance called for entering a disposal date, the REMIS data entry screens did not clearly indicate whether or where users should enter the date.
- RESNC provided limited REMIS training; 3 of 32 districts that use REMIS received introductory training in 2006 and 2007. RESNC plans to train the New England District and at least one other district in 2008. RESNC also sponsored conferences to update systems administrators and other users on key changes to REMIS, but conference presenters discussed aspects of REMIS that some attendees, including real estate officials from 2 of the districts GAO contacted, considered too advanced—especially for those who had never received introductory training.