



Highlights of [GAO-10-547T](#), testimony before the Subcommittee on Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Under the Defense Environmental Restoration Program (DERP), the Department of Defense (DOD) is responsible for cleaning up about 5,400 sites on military bases that have been closed under the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process, as well as 21,500 sites on active bases and over 4,700 formerly used defense sites (FUDS), properties that DOD owned or controlled and transferred to other parties prior to October 1986. The cleanup of contaminants, such as hazardous chemicals or unexploded ordnance, at BRAC bases has been an impediment to the timely transfer of these properties to parties who can put them to new uses. The goals of DERP include (1) reducing risk to human health and the environment (2) preparing BRAC properties to be environmentally suitable for transfer (3) having final remedies in place and completing response actions and (4) fulfilling other established milestones to demonstrate progress toward meeting program performance goals.

This testimony is based on prior work and discusses information on (1) how DOD allocates cleanup funding at all sites with defense waste and (2) BRAC cleanup status. It also summarizes other key issues that GAO has identified in the past that can impact DOD's environmental cleanup efforts.

View [GAO-10-547T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Anu Mittal at (202) 512-3841 or [mittala@gao.gov](mailto:mittala@gao.gov), or John B. Stephenson at (202) 512-3841 or [stephensonj@gao.gov](mailto:stephensonj@gao.gov).

## ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINATION

### Information on the Funding and Cleanup Status of Defense Sites

#### What GAO Found

DOD uses the same method to propose funding for cleanup at FUDS, active sites, and BRAC sites; cleanup funding is based on DERP goals and is generally proportional to the number of sites in each of these categories. Officials in the Military Departments, Defense Agencies, and FUDS program, who are responsible for executing the environmental restoration activities at their respective sites, formulate cleanup budget proposals using the instructions in DOD's financial management regulation and DERP environmental restoration performance goals.

DERP's goals include target dates for reaching the remedy-in-place or response complete (RIP/RC) milestone. For example, for sites included under the first four BRAC rounds, the goal is to reach the RIP/RC milestone at sites with hazardous substances released before October 1986 by 2015 and for sites in the 2005 BRAC round by 2014. DOD's military components plan cleanup actions that are required to meet DERP goals at the installation or site level. DOD requires the components to assess their inventory of BRAC and other sites by relative risk to help make informed decisions about which sites to clean up first. Using these relative risk categories, as well as other factors, the components set more specific restoration targets each fiscal year to demonstrate progress and prepare a budget to achieve those goals and targets.

DOD data show that, in applying the goals, and targets, cleanup funding has generally been proportional to the number of sites in the FUDS, active, and BRAC site categories. For example, the total number of BRAC sites requiring cleanup is about 17 percent of the total number of defense sites requiring cleanup, while the \$440.2 million obligated to address BRAC sites in fiscal year 2008 is equivalent to about 25 percent of the total funds obligated for this purpose for all defense waste sites.

GAO's past work has also shown that DOD's preliminary cost estimates for cleanup generally tend to rise significantly as more information becomes known about the level of contamination at a specific site. In addition, three factors can lead to delays in cleanup. They are (1) technological constraints that limit DOD's ability to detect and cleanup certain kinds of hazards, (2) prolonged negotiations with environmental regulators on the extent to which DOD's actions are in compliance with regulations and laws, and (3) the discovery of previously unknown hazards that can require additional cleanup, increase costs, and delay transfer of the property.