

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-436](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Through BRAC and other growth initiatives, DOD has made significant changes to its force structure, affecting communities around DOD installations. To help transition toward a smaller, more agile force, DOD has requested new BRAC authority. House Report 112-479, accompanying the fiscal year 2013 National Defense Authorization Act, directed GAO to study the practices and strategies that communities have used to cope with installation closure or growth. This report (1) describes the practices and strategies communities have used in dealing with base closures and growth since 2005 and economic and population data in those communities and (2) presents information on communities' needs in adjusting to installation closure and growth. GAO interviewed DOD, service, and installation officials; interviewed and surveyed community representatives; reviewed relevant guidance; and visited select installations.

What GAO Recommends

DOD concurred with GAO's recommendation that the Army issue guidance on maintenance levels to be provided during the base closure process. DOD partially concurred that it should establish procedures for sharing additional information with growth communities and designate a civilian point of contact at growth installations. GAO believes action by DOD prior to future installation growth will help forestall future challenges.

View [GAO-13-436](#). For more information, contact James R. McTigue, Jr. at (202) 512-7968 or mctiguej@gao.gov.

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DEFENSE INFRASTRUCTURE:

Communities Need Additional Guidance and Information to Improve Their Ability to Adjust to DOD Installation Closure or Growth

What GAO Found

The 21 communities surrounding the 23 Department of Defense (DOD) installations closed in the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) round have used strategies such as forming a local redevelopment authority and seeking federal grants to deal with the closures. Some economic data for these communities are comparable to national averages, with some variation. For instance, GAO found that 52 percent (11 of 21) of communities had unemployment rates lower than the national average of 8.9 percent, although the rates ranged from a low of 6.1 percent to a high of 16.8 percent. Sixty-two percent (13 of 21) of the closure communities had real per capita income growth rates higher than the national average of 0.14 percent for the period from 2006 through 2011. Since 2005, 23 other installations have experienced population increases that have resulted in net growth of about 191,000 military and civilian personnel (a 36 percent increase), and their corresponding communities have used several strategies to accommodate this growth, including forming a regional working group composed of representatives from affected jurisdictions.

Community representatives stated that DOD's Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) provides good support to communities facing base closure, but some representatives from communities surrounding closed Army installations stated that facilities were not maintained at a high enough level for reuse. An Army official told GAO that the Army makes an effort to maintain closed facilities in accordance with their planned usage and that local redevelopment authorities have unrealistic expectations of maintenance levels. DOD guidance states that the services have developed specific maintenance levels for facilities during the transition process. The Air Force and the Navy have published this specific guidance, but the Army has not and instead relies upon DOD's guidance, which does not describe specific levels of maintenance. Without clear guidance on the expected levels of maintenance for closed facilities, the communities may not have a clear understanding of what maintenance the Army will provide.

Community representatives indicated that OEA provides good support to communities facing base growth, but that additional data and a civilian point of contact at the installation could improve their ability to respond to future growth. DOD has issued guidance that states communities should be provided maximum advance information to plan, and service guidance states that services will give communities information including military and personnel changes. However, community representatives told GAO that they would like additional aggregate information on where servicemembers live while stationed at the installation to facilitate planning for the impact of installation growth. Installations currently do not provide communities with this information because they do not have a system to track it, but officials noted that existing systems could potentially be modified to provide it. Installation officials and community representatives also stated that establishing a long-term civilian point of contact at the installation would help the community effectively plan for growth. Accurate and timely information on personnel residence areas and a civilian point of contact at the installation could better facilitate communities' efforts to accommodate installation growth.