

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-375](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Over 3 billion tons of HAZMAT are transported by commercial carriers in the United States each year. DOD accounted for about 1.6 million HAZMAT shipments in fiscal year 2013, using commercial and military carriers. These shipments can be high risk and highly sensitive and if improperly handled, labeled, or packaged could result in the loss of life, property damage, and harm to national security interests.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013 mandates GAO to review DOD's guidance, policies, and procedures regarding HAZMAT shipments. GAO examined the (1) statutes, regulations, guidance, policies, and procedures that govern DOD's handling, labeling, and packaging of HAZMAT shipments to support military operations and (2) extent to which DOD faces any challenges in implementing its policies and procedures for transporting HAZMAT in a safe, timely, and cost-effective manner. GAO examined DOD's and DOT's regulations and related DOD documentation for the transport of HAZMAT and found the 2009-13 data it examined sufficiently reliable for the purposes of the review.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD improve the documentation and secure hold of HAZMAT shipments and examine limitations on data used to select certain HAZMAT carriers. DOD generally agreed with the recommendations but requested one be directed to a different office. GAO agreed and made the associated change.

View [GAO-14-375](#). For more information, contact Cary B. Russell at (202) 512-5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

May 2014

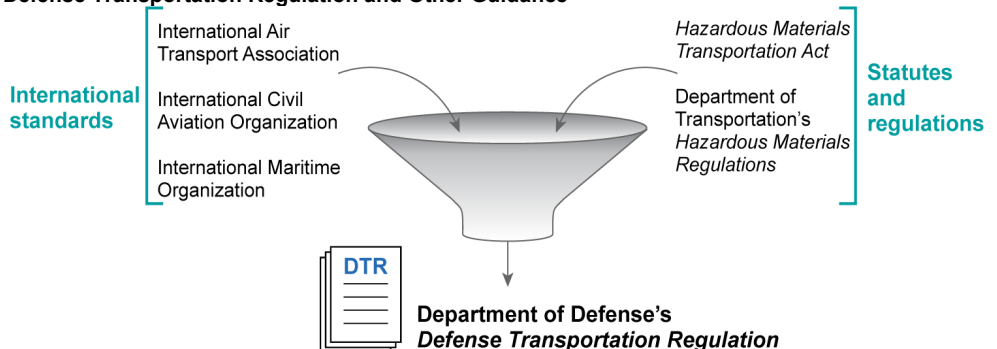
DEFENSE TRANSPORTATION

DOD Needs to Take Actions to Improve the Transportation of Hazardous Material Shipments

What GAO Found

The handling, labeling, and packaging of hazardous materials (HAZMAT) shipments are governed by a complex framework of statutes and regulations prescribed by multiple civilian and military entities (see figure below). The Hazardous Materials Transportation Act is the primary statutory regime governing the transport of HAZMAT in the United States. To implement the act, the Department of Transportation (DOT) issued the Hazardous Materials Regulations. The Defense Transportation Regulation prescribes how the Department of Defense (DOD) is to transport HAZMAT.

Existing Statutory and Regulatory Elements That Department of Defense Incorporated into the Defense Transportation Regulation and Other Guidance



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense, Department of Transportation, and international standards for transporting HAZMAT.

DOD has experienced some challenges in implementing HAZMAT regulations and other guidance, which can adversely affect the safe, timely, and cost-effective transportation of HAZMAT. For example, GAO found the following:

- Improper documentation and packaging of HAZMAT led to delays at DOD transportation aerial ports. DOD data show that about 27 percent of HAZMAT received at all five major domestic military aerial ports over the past 5 fiscal years were delayed, primarily due to noncompliant documentation and packaging.
- At least 44 times during fiscal years 2012 and 2013, DOD installations did not provide commercial carriers with access to secure hold areas for arms, ammunition, and explosives shipments or assist them in finding alternatives, as required by DOD regulations. Although there were about 70,891 of these types of arms, ammunition, and explosives shipments in fiscal years 2012 and 2013, not providing secure hold for even a small percentage of these sensitive shipments poses a risk to public safety and national security.
- DOD may determine which carriers should be eligible to transport its most-sensitive HAZMAT shipments using a safety score that lacks sufficient information to reliably assess safety performance for many carriers. DOD uses DOT's Safety Measurement System scores to determine which carriers are eligible to participate in its Transportation Protective Services program. However, in February 2014 GAO found that scores from many carriers lack sufficient safety performance data to reliably compare them with other commercial carriers' scores.