

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104744](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The estimated cost to the federal government of cleaning up environmental contamination, referred to as environmental liabilities, was \$613 billion in fiscal year 2021. This is an increase from \$465 billion in fiscal year 2017. DOD's fiscal year 2021 share of environmental liabilities was the second highest among federal agencies, at about \$82 billion. Federal law authorizes DOD to identify, investigate, and clean up contamination from hazardous substances and military munitions that it caused on properties used for military purposes and that were conveyed out of DOD's jurisdiction prior to 1986. These types of contamination can harm both humans and the environment.

House Report 116-120 included a provision for GAO to review the various elements of FUDS. Among other objectives, this report (1) describes the scope and costs of cleaning up FUDS and the reliability of the estimates and (2) examines how DOD selects FUDS for cleanup. GAO reviewed DOD documents, interviewed DOD officials, and analyzed a DOD database containing information on the FUDS program.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD (1) develop guidance to weigh the relative risk between IRP and MMRP sites and (2) establish a relevant cleanup goal for the FUDS MMRP program. DOD agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-22-104744](#). For more information, contact Nathan Anderson at (202) 512-3841 or andersonn@gao.gov.

June 2022

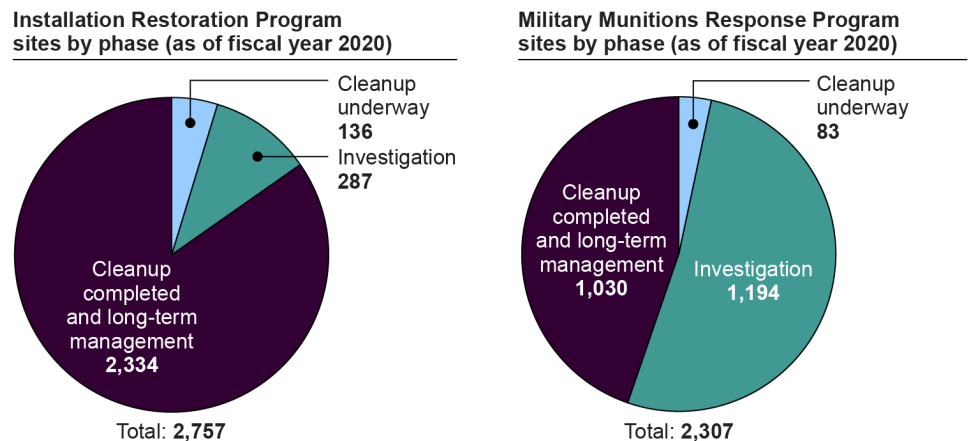
ENVIRONMENTAL LIABILITIES

Improvements Needed to Measure Progress of Cleanup of Formerly Used Defense Sites

What GAO Found

In fiscal year 2020, the Department of Defense (DOD) estimated that it would cost about \$10.2 billion to clean up about 1,700 sites in its Formerly Used Defense Sites (FUDS) program. FUDS consists of two main programs: the Installation Restoration Program (IRP), to address hazardous substances, and the Military Munitions Response Program (MMRP), to address military munitions. Environmental liabilities represent future costs to clean up these sites. FUDS environmental liabilities are about 27 percent for IRP and about 73 percent for MMRP. DOD has obligated over \$1 billion for FUDS between fiscal year 2016 and 2020, split roughly equally between IRP and MMRP sites. Since the inception of the FUDS program, DOD has cleaned up 85 percent of IRP sites and 45 percent of MMRP sites. Some costs of future cleanup efforts are uncertain, in part because nearly 1,200 MMRP sites are under investigation, and cleanup remedies are not yet known (see fig.). DOD's cost estimates for individual sites improve as it completes investigations and identifies specific remedies.

Formerly Used Defense Sites Under Investigation, Compared to Cleanup



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data. | GAO-22-104744

When making decisions to fund FUDS cleanup, DOD primarily selects the sites posing the greatest risk to human health and the environment by assigning risk scores for each site. DOD assigns scores differently for IRP and MMRP sites. However, DOD does not have guidance to weigh the relative risk between IRP and MMRP sites. If DOD developed guidance, it could better ensure that it is consistent and transparent when selecting sites from IRP and MMRP for funding.

Federal law requires that DOD report on progress of its cleanup programs. In 2012, DOD developed a goal for IRP to complete cleanup of at least 95 percent of sites by the end of fiscal year 2021. DOD did not develop a comparable goal for FUDS MMRP, stating, for example, that developing a goal for FUDS MMRP sites was not practical, given the large number of sites. However, DOD developed goals for other non-FUDS cleanup programs with a similar number of sites. If DOD were to develop a cleanup goal for FUDS MMRP, Congress would be better positioned to hold DOD accountable for achieving a reasonable level of cleanup progress, and the public would be better informed.