



Highlights of [GAO-07-143](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on National Security and International Relations, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The *2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report* states that the Department of Defense (DOD) must be prepared to respond to and mitigate the effects of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) attacks at home or overseas. Moreover, the Secretary of Defense directed the U.S. military to define the nature and potential requests for military capabilities needed to respond to 15 National Planning Scenarios issued by the Homeland Security Council. The Army's chemical units are key players in this mission.

GAO was asked to evaluate the preparedness of the Army's chemical and biological units, including the extent to which (1) units tasked with providing chemical and biological defense support to combat units and commands are adequately staffed, equipped, and trained and (2) units also tasked with a homeland defense mission—especially National Guard and Reserve units—are adequately prepared for this mission. During this review, we analyzed readiness data and other preparedness indicators for 78 Army chemical units.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends actions to address long-standing chemical unit personnel and equipment shortages; and better enable Army chemical units to perform wartime and homeland defense missions. DOD generally agreed with two recommendations and disagreed with those to address unit personnel and equipment shortages. GAO continues to believe its recommendations have merit.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-143](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-143).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Davi D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or [dagostinod@gao.gov](mailto:dagostinod@gao.gov).

# CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL DEFENSE

## Management Actions Are Needed to Close the Gap between Army Chemical Unit Preparedness and Stated National Priorities

### What GAO Found

Most Army units tasked with providing chemical and biological defense support are not adequately staffed, equipped, or trained to perform their missions. Although the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review and current operational plans highlight the need to mitigate WMD attacks at home and abroad and DOD has doubled its investment in chemical and biological defenses since 2001 and plans to increase funding for this program during fiscal years 2006 through 2011, there is a misalignment between the high priority DOD states that it places on chemical and biological defense and the current low level of chemical unit readiness. Most of the Army's chemical and biological units, particularly in the National Guard and Reserve, are reporting the lowest readiness ratings—meaning that they are not considered sufficiently qualified for deployment. This situation reflects critical personnel shortages, particularly in their key occupational specialty—chemical operations—and shortages of mission-critical equipment, such as decontamination equipment. Lacking key personnel and equipment, some units have not been able to train for their wartime chemical and biological defense missions. Army chemical unit readiness problems have historically been attributed to personnel and equipment shortages, and recently these have been greatly exacerbated by personnel and equipment transfers to other types of units in support of current operations. Moreover, the Army does not have a specific plan in place to resolve long-standing shortages in personnel and equipment. Until the Army develops a specific plan to address personnel and decontamination equipment shortfalls and the transfer of chemical operations specialists to deploying units, adequate chemical defense forces may not be available in the event of a WMD attack at home or abroad.

Even though 12 of the 15 National Planning Scenarios issued by the Homeland Security Council involve chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or high-yield explosive (CBRNE) response, the ability of Army chemical and biological units, especially National Guard and Reserve units, to concurrently perform both their original warfighting chemical and biological defense mission and their homeland defense mission is doubtful. While the Joint Task Force-Civil Support deployment data list contains a limited number of chemical and biological units that must be ready to perform homeland defense missions, the forces on this list, according to United States Northern Command planning documents, are intended only to be an initial response force. The Army is prohibiting the transfer of personnel and equipment from units on this deployment list to deploying units overseas. However, it is unclear whether this is an adequate number of units to support the homeland defense mission because no criteria have been established to determine how many and which chemical units are needed. In the event of multiple near-simultaneous WMD attacks in the United States, additional chemical units would be required—but most chemical and biological units are already at a low state of readiness and DOD has not updated doctrine for addressing the new homeland defense missions.