



Highlights of [GAO-07-166](#) a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The cleanup of environmental contamination on unneeded property resulting from prior defense base realignment and closure (BRAC) rounds has been a key impediment to the transfer of these properties and could be an issue in the transfer and reuse of unneeded property resulting from the 2005 BRAC round. GAO's analysis of available data indicates that, when completed, the cleanup for the four prior BRAC rounds is expected to cost about \$13.2 billion and additional costs will be needed for BRAC 2005 property. These costs reduce BRAC savings, especially in the short term.

Because of broad congressional interest in BRAC, GAO prepared this report under the Comptroller General's authority to conduct evaluations on his own initiative. GAO's objectives were to examine costs to clean up 2005 BRAC properties, progress in transferring prior BRAC rounds properties to other users, and opportunities to expedite cleanups and transfers. To address these issues, GAO analyzed cleanup cost estimates, interviewed environmental officials and visited seven bases.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that DOD improve its reporting of BRAC environmental cleanup costs to Congress and share lessons learned in the use of all available tools to clean up and transfer property. DOD partially concurred with GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-166.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Brian Lepore (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov.

MILITARY BASE CLOSURES

Opportunities Exist to Improve Environmental Cleanup Cost Reporting and to Expedite Transfer of Unneeded Property

What GAO Found

While expected environmental cleanup costs for unneeded property arising from the 2005 BRAC round are not yet fully known, Department of Defense (DOD) data indicate that about \$950 million will be needed to clean up these bases, adding to the estimated \$13.2 billion total cleanup cost for the prior rounds. Although DOD's cleanup program has matured compared to prior BRAC rounds, there are still many unknowns and the cleanup estimate for the 2005 round should be considered preliminary. In fact, environmental cleanup costs are likely to increase as more intensive environmental investigations are undertaken, additional hazardous conditions are discovered, and future reuse plans are finalized. Furthermore, Congress does not have full visibility over the total cost of DOD's BRAC cleanup efforts because none of the four reports DOD prepares on various aspects of environmental cleanup present all types of costs—past and future—to complete cleanup at each base. Compiling a complete picture of all costs requires extracting information from multiple reports, as GAO has done to estimate the total cleanup cost for the four prior BRAC rounds. More complete and transparent cost information would assist Congress in conducting its oversight responsibilities for this multibillion dollar effort.

While GAO's analysis shows that DOD continues to make progress in transferring over 502,500 acres of unneeded property from the four prior BRAC rounds—78 percent of the acres have now been transferred compared to 72 percent 2 years ago—over 112,300 acres remain untransferred. Comparatively, a total of about 102,000 acres are potentially transferable as a result of the 2005 BRAC round. Impediments to transfer continue to be related primarily to a variety of interrelated environmental cleanup issues, including limited technology to address unexploded ordnance and prolonged negotiations on compliance with environmental regulations.

Opportunities exist to expedite the cleanup and transfer of unneeded 2005 BRAC properties compared with other BRAC rounds. Congress provided DOD with a wide range of property transfer authorities for prior BRAC rounds. In the past DOD did not use some tools as much as others out of deference to community land reuse plans. For example, low- and no-cost transfer tools accounted for 65 percent of all acres transferred, whereas public and negotiated sales accounted for 5 percent. DOD's March 2006 guidance now encourages the services to make full use of all tools for transferring properties resulting from both the 2005 and prior-year BRAC rounds. The services have processes in place to monitor their progress to clean up and transfer BRAC properties, but they are not required to report periodically to the Office of the Secretary of Defense on their successes and challenges in using various transfer authorities. Collectively, such lessons learned could help others expedite the cleanup and transfer of unneeded properties by maximizing the use of all available tools, thereby accelerating the economic benefits of property reuse to communities while also saving the ongoing caretaker costs being incurred by DOD for unneeded properties.