December 2010

DEFENSE ACQUISITIONS

Opportunities Exist to Improve DOD's Oversight of Power Source Investments

GAO Accountability • Integrity • Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of GAO-11-113, a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Virtually all Department of Defense (DOD) weapon systems and equipment rely on power sources, such as batteries. In response to a mandate in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010, GAO determined (1) DOD's approximate investment in power sources, (2) the extent to which DOD coordinates its power source investments, and (3) the extent to which DOD's policies facilitate the use of standard power sources. To address these objectives, GAO obtained and analyzed DOD investment data, met with DOD officials and industry representatives, and attended DOD conferences aimed at facilitating power source coordination.

What GAO Recommends

To increase oversight of power source investments, GAO recommends that DOD consider how to best aggregate departmentwide investment data. To improve interagency coordination of S&T projects, DOD should determine ways to strengthen agency participation in coordination mechanisms. To increase emphasis on standardization, DOD should develop a standardization plan and enforceable departmentwide policies and identify opportunities to retrofit existing systems with standard power sources when cost effective. DOD concurred with the first recommendation and partially concurred with the other four. It was unclear from DOD's response what actions it plans to take in response to GAO's recommendations.

View GAO-11-113 or key components. For more information, contact Michael J. Sullivan at (202) 512-4841 or sullivanm@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

GAO determined that DOD has invested at least $2.1 billion in power sources from fiscal year 2006 through fiscal year 2010. However, DOD lacks comprehensive, departmentwide data for its total investment in the power sources area. Availability of complete data varies across the three investment categories: science and technology (S&T), logistics support, and acquisition programs. While DOD appears to have adequate departmentwide data on S&T efforts, it does not have departmentwide data for all logistics support investments. DOD lacks sufficient data on its investments in power sources when they are developed or purchased for acquisition programs. The $2.1 billion amount includes investments in S&T and logistics support that GAO was able to identify, but not power source investments as part of acquisition programs because of the difficulty in obtaining investment data in that area. This lack of complete, departmentwide investment data hinders DOD's oversight and future planning in the power sources area, adversely affecting its ability to ensure basic accountability, anticipate future funding, and measure performance.

DOD's mechanisms for coordinating power source S&T—including interagency working groups, conferences, informal networks, and information technology resources—are generally effective. However, in some of these activities participation by pertinent member agencies is voluntary and could be more complete. Agencies may be missing opportunities to coordinate activities—such as avoiding initiation of similar research projects—and leverage resources because agency participation is voluntary and the level of participation by pertinent agencies varies. In addition, DOD's strategic planning process to facilitate the allocation of S&T funds for power source technologies could be improved. The S&T planning efforts can also be complicated by external factors, such as the additions Congress makes to DOD's budget.

Although DOD power source experts GAO staff spoke with agree that the department needs to increase its emphasis on power source standardization, DOD lacks departmentwide policies to help emphasize power source standardization. Existing policies have demonstrated limited effectiveness because of compliance problems and because they may only apply to specific power source applications. Although it is generally more economical to address standardization early in the acquisition process, according to DOD officials, power sources are generally not considered early in the process, potentially hindering standardization efforts. DOD has also not evaluated departmentwide opportunities for retrofitting deployed weapon systems and equipment with standard or other preferred power sources when cost effective.