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General Accounting Office
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Resources, Community, and
Economic Development Division

B-277102

June 27, 1997

The Honorable Joe McDade
Chairman, Subcommittee on
Energy and Water Development
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Subject: Department of Energy: Status of DOE's Efforts to Improve Training

As requested, we are providing you with information on the status of the Department of Energy's (DOE) efforts to improve its training program. In early 1995, DOE reviewed its training program and found a number of deficiencies, including duplication and waste associated with the development and delivery of training and poor recordkeeping of completed training. The review concluded, among other things, that if certain responsibility and accountability changes were made, approximately \$50 million in annual training costs could be avoided. To improve training and realize savings, DOE, in July 1995, issued a strategic training implementation plan for its federal employees. DOE intends to develop a similar document to improve the training of its contractors. The implementation plan includes a number of individual activities that need to be accomplished. DOE has also established performance goals to measure its progress in improving training within the Department. As agreed with your office, this report summarizes the status of activities listed in the most recent version of DOE's strategic training implementation plan and the extent to which DOE has met the performance goals associated with the plan (additional details are contained in the enc. D).

SUMMARY

Since the plan's initial issuance, DOE has (1) established a DOE-wide training structure framework; (2) collected baseline training cost data; and (3) created DOE's training home page and bulletin board on the Internet. Nevertheless,

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DOE has been slow to implement many of the activities outlined in the strategic plan. For instance, the plan specified that a Training and Development Management Council should be established and conduct its first meeting by September 1995. The Council has the overall responsibility for overseeing the efforts to improve DOE's training program. DOE's records show that the Council did not conduct its first meeting until July 1996, or 10 months later than planned. According to DOE officials, higher-priority work prevented the Department from convening the Council sooner. In addition, when the strategic plan was initially issued, DOE intended to implement all of the activities specified by December 1996. However, as of April 30, 1997, DOE indicated that a majority of the activities were still in process and had completion dates extending to the end of calendar year 1998.

DOE has also determined that several activities are no longer applicable. For example, DOE had intended to standardize all training that has application throughout the Department.¹ According to the strategic training plan, DOE offices were independently developing such training, which was resulting in a waste of resources and nonstandardized training within DOE. Department officials, however, have determined that the standardization of all training that has application throughout DOE is too comprehensive in scope and needs to be addressed through a step-by-step approach. Therefore, DOE is considering deleting this activity from the strategic training plan. Similarly, DOE intends to delete a number of other activities related to the standardization of training.

Finally, DOE has largely not met the specific performance goals established for the strategic plan. Those goals consisted of (1) a 50-percent reduction by March 1997 in the number of duplicate training courses offered by DOE and its contractors; (2) having its pilot Center of Excellence rated successful by more than half of its customers;² and (3) a 15-percent reduction in DOE's and its contractors' training expenditures in fiscal year 1997. According to DOE officials, the Department must first enter all training courses into a central database (scheduled for October 1997) before it can analyze courses and reduce redundancy. DOE officials also said the Department cannot complete a customer satisfaction survey on the pilot Center of Excellence until after the center is fully functioning (scheduled for July 1997). Finally, DOE officials

¹This training includes, for example, project management, engineering fundamentals, radiological controls, safety and health, and supervisory skills.

²Generally, a Center of Excellence is an organization that has been selected for its training, development, and technical expertise in a topical area that cuts across the entire Department.

indicated that training expenditures for fiscal year 1997 will decrease by about 8 percent.

AGENCY COMMENTS

We provided copies of a draft of our report to DOE for its review and comment. In written comments (see enc. II), DOE states that the report does not fully describe its accomplishments, how the Department has adapted the plan to meet new circumstances, and its continued commitment to improving training.

In the comments, DOE highlights a number of accomplishments. Most of these are cited in our report. The major exception is a 21-percent reduction in training costs from fiscal year 1995 through fiscal year 1997 claimed by DOE. In our view, it is unclear that this reduction is attributable to the activities of the strategic training implementation plan, which was the subject of our review, since no major activity completed under the plan directly ties to dollar savings.

DOE also points out that changing circumstances have affected its ability to meet the milestones in its plan.³ These changing circumstances include (1) reductions in budget and training personnel resources, (2) downsizing and reorganization activities, and (3) changes in the way the Department contracts for certain key services. Our report recognizes that in some cases DOE was required to alter its plan. All of the specific modifications to the plan that are cited in DOE's comments are discussed in this report.

Finally, DOE's comments stress its continued commitment to the training improvement initiative. The Department points out that (1) the Training and Development Management Council will meet in July 1997 to review progress to date and to affirm new goals, (2) two Centers of Excellence will be established by December 1997, and (3) DOE will issue a revised training improvement plan to serve as a starting point for implementing a more focused initiative for fiscal years 1998 and 1999. While these efforts were not included in our review, we are pleased to note DOE's commitment to improving its training program.

³The original plan dated July 1995 forms a baseline from which DOE's progress can be measured.

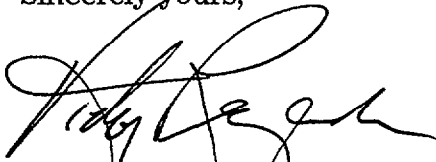
SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We conducted our work at DOE headquarters in Washington, D.C. We obtained DOE's strategic training plan and the status information on that plan from DOE's Office of Training and Human Resource Development. We discussed this information with DOE officials from that office as well as with DOE officials from other departmental offices who are assisting in the implementation of the training plan. We verified the accuracy of the status information provided to the extent that DOE had documented specific actions. To meet your needs to have this report in time for the fiscal year 1998 budget cycle, we did not analyze the reasons why DOE has not met more of the target dates listed in the training plan. We also obtained from DOE's Office of Training and Human Resource Development a list of the performance goals that had been established for the training plan and discussed the status of those goals with DOE officials from that office. We performed this work from May through June 1997 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report for 30 days. At that time, we will provide copies to appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Energy, and other interested parties. We will also make copies available to others upon request.

Please call me at (202) 512-3841 if you or your staff have any questions. Major contributors to this report include Robert Baney, William Seay, and William Fenzel.

Sincerely yours,



Victor S. Rezendes
Director, Energy, Resources,
and Science Issues

Enclosures - 2

STATUS OF MAJOR ACTIVITIES AND PERFORMANCE GOALS
ASSOCIATED WITH DOE'S DECEMBER 1996 STRATEGIC TRAINING
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Table I.1: Status of DOE's Activities to Establish a DOE-Wide Training and Development Management Council

Planned activity	Initial target completion date ^a	DOE-reported status (as of April 30, 1997)
Draft a Training and Development Management Council charter ^b	August 1995	Completed May 1996
Nominate and approve council members	August 1995	Completed June 1996
Conduct first Training and Development Management Council meeting	September 1995	Completed July 1996
Approve Training and Development Management Council charter	September 1995	Completed August 1996
Develop and approve DOE-wide training policy	December 1995	In process. Policy drafted in September 1996. Draft undergoing review, comment, and comment resolution.

^aThe initial target date is the date specified by DOE for completing the activity when the activity was first listed in the strategic plan.

^bThe Council has been chartered to establish a DOE-wide approach to formulating and executing training within the Department. Responsibilities include establishing DOE's overall policy and strategies for the education, training, and development of all employees in support of the Department's mission and vision.

Table I.2: Status of DOE's Activities to Consolidate Program Management and Headquarters Support for Federal Training

Planned activity	Initial target completion date ^a	DOE-reported status (as of April 30, 1997)
Establish a framework for the DOE-wide training structure	November 1996	Completed April 1997
Present to and have approved the DOE-wide training structure by the Training and Development Management Council	January 1997	In process. Draft describing the DOE-wide training structure undergoing review.
Update and reissue DOE's strategic training plan	June 1997	In process. DOE's overall strategic plan is being revisited with a new overall plan anticipated by the fall of 1997. It is anticipated that DOE-wide training will become a part of this new overall plan.

^aThe initial target date is the date specified by DOE for completing the activity when the activity was first listed in the strategic plan.

Table I.3: Status of DOE's Activities to Standardize the Development and Implementation of Federal Training Programs That Have Cross-Cutting Applicability

Planned activity	Initial target completion date ^a	DOE-reported status (as of April 30, 1997)
Establish an in-house cadre of trainers for cross-cutting training	November 1995	Completed July 1996
Establish qualification requirements for instructors of cross-cutting training	December 1995	Completed August 1996
Issue directives and /or procedures for the standardized implementation of cross-cutting training	December 1995	No longer applicable. The DOE team working on implementation of this activity has determined it to be too broad in scope. ^b DOE is considering deleting this activity from the plan.
Initiate the implementation of cross-cutting training activities	January 1996	No longer applicable. The DOE team working on implementation of this activity has determined it to be too broad in scope. ^b DOE is considering deleting this activity from the plan.
Identify cross-cutting training courses that will be centrally managed	March 1996	Completed August 1996
Initiate the validation/approval of cross-cutting training courses	June 1996	No longer applicable. The DOE team working on implementation of this activity has determined it to be too broad in scope. ^b DOE is considering deleting this activity from the plan.
Establish standards for the review and validation of cross-cutting training courses	August 1996	No longer applicable. The DOE team working on implementation of this activity has determined it to be too broad in scope. ^b DOE is considering deleting this activity from the plan.

Planned activity	Initial target completion date ^a	DOE-reported status (as of April 30, 1997)
Complete the review of existing training courses to determine if they meet cross-cutting training standards	September 1996	No longer applicable. The DOE team working on implementation of this activity has determined it to be too broad in scope. ^b DOE is considering deleting this activity from the plan.
Develop technical qualification standards for employees receiving cross-cutting training	October 1996	No longer applicable. Implemented under DOE's technical qualification program. ^c
Initiate the revision/development of cross-cutting training courses	December 1996	No longer applicable. The DOE team working on implementation of this activity has determined it to be too broad in scope. ^b DOE is considering deleting this activity from the plan.
Define the management of cross-cutting training as a part of the DOE-wide training structure roles and responsibilities	December 1996	No longer applicable. The DOE team working on implementation of this activity has determined it to be too broad in scope. ^b DOE is considering deleting this activity from the plan.

^aThe initial target date is the date specified by DOE for completing the activity when the activity was first listed in the strategic plan.

^bBecause of the large number of training courses offered by various DOE offices, DOE officials told us that they are considering addressing this activity in smaller steps.

^cThe technical qualification program is designed to identify the qualification standards for those employees (GS-15 and below) performing activities related to management, direction, or oversight that could affect the safe operation of defense nuclear facilities.

Table I.4: Status of DOE's Activities to Establish Centers of Excellence for Key Training and Development Activities

Planned activity	Initial target completion date ^a	DOE-reported status (as of April 30, 1997)
Establish a process and criteria for the selection of Centers of Excellence ^b	October 1995	Partially completed. Criteria completed September 1996. Criteria validation and process for the nomination and selection of Centers of Excellence is ongoing.
Establish the reporting relationship between the Centers of Excellence and the DOE-wide training structure	September 1995	In process. Policy drafted and being reviewed.
Designate a pilot Center of Excellence	November 1995	In process. The Center of Excellence proposal is being evaluated against established criteria. The evaluation is planned to be completed by the end of May 1997.
Select additional Centers of Excellence	March 1996	In process. There are funding constraints associated with the Centers of Excellence. The target completion date for selecting additional Centers of Excellence is unknown.
Fully implement the pilot Center of Excellence	June 1996	In process. The target date for full implementation of the pilot Center of Excellence is July 1997.
Implement the Lead Site Program ^c	July 1996	Completed May 1996

^aThe initial target date is the date specified by DOE for completing the activity when the activity was first listed in the strategic plan.

^bGenerally, a Center of Excellence is an organization that has been selected for its training, development, and technical expertise in a topical area that cuts across the entire Department.

^cThe Lead Site Program will be used to share, across the Department, the identification and development of the various learning activities needed to support the Technical Qualification Program. All of the competencies contained in the qualifications standards have been grouped

ENCLOSURE I

ENCLOSURE I

into 28 topical areas. The topical areas have been assigned to operations offices as lead sites to identify and develop the appropriate learning activities for that topical area.

Table I.5: Status of DOE's Activities to Establish a DOE-Wide Planning, Budgeting, and Performance Measurement Process for Federal Training

Planned activity	Initial target completion date ^a	DOE-reported status (as of April 30, 1997)
Establish an intra-Department team to develop planning, budgeting, and performance measurement process	August 1995	Completed June 1996
Collect baseline training cost data ^b	October 1995	Completed April 1996
Training and Development Management Council approves the planning, budgeting, and performance measurement process	December 1995	In process. Annual training plan format, budget tracking performance categories, and standard training performance measurements being reviewed within the Office of Training and Human Resource Development.
Implement the new planning, budgeting, and performance measurement process	March 1996	In process. The new planning, budgeting, and performance measurement process is scheduled to be submitted to the Training and Management Development Council for approval in June 1997.
Establish working groups for the development and implementation of fiscal year 1998 Training Program Execution Guidance	March 1997	In process. DOE's Office of Training and Human Resource Development is taking the lead in establishing the working groups and looking at the DOE-wide training goals.
Incorporate the annual planning, budgeting, and performance measurement process into the DOE system of orders	October 1997	In process. A revision to DOE Order 360.1 on training has been initiated. The new order is expected to be submitted to the Department's directive system for review and concurrence by September 1997.

^aThe initial target date is the date specified by DOE for completing the activity when the activity was first listed in the strategic plan.

^bDOE submitted this training cost information to the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, House Committee on Appropriations, in April 1996.

Table I.6: Status of DOE's Activities to Integrate Training Scheduling, Registration, and Records Management Into a Single System

Planned activity	Initial target completion date ^a	DOE-reported status (as of April 30, 1997)
Develop a draft process and requirements for a scheduling, registration, and records management system	December 1995	No longer applicable. Replaced by a DOE priority schedule to implement the scheduling, registration, and records management system.
Establish an intra-Department team to develop a process and requirements for a scheduling, registration, and records management system	March 1996	Completed June 1996
Establish a formal working relationship with DOE's Office of Information Management	March 1996	Completed December 1996
Establish hardware and software requirements for the scheduling, registration, and records management system	March 1996	Completed December 1996
Pilot test the scheduling, registration, and records management system at a headquarters and a field office	June 1996	No longer applicable. Replaced by a DOE priority schedule to implement the scheduling, registration, and records management system.
Establish a distance learning strategic information management process	June 1996	Partially completed. A strategic information management process initiative was established. The initiative cannot be undertaken because of funding issues; therefore, current target completion date of September 1997 is tentative.
Bring on-line DOE's training home page and bulletin board	June 1996	Completed September 1996
Select the scheduling, registration, and records management system	October 1996	Completed September 1996

Planned activity	Initial target completion date ^a	DOE-reported status (as of April 30, 1997)
Fully implement the scheduling, registration, and records management system	December 1996	In process. DOE plans to fully implement the scheduling, registration, and records management system by the end of calendar year 1998.
Bring on-line DOE's Universal Catalog ^b	January 1997	Partially completed. The Universal Catalog was brought on-line in October 1996. As of April 30, 1997, training classes from seven sponsoring offices were in the Catalog. Other DOE offices are updating their classes and will be added to the Universal Catalog when submitted.
Implement distance learning	March 1997	In process. The distance learning initiative can not be undertaken because of funding issues; therefore, current target completion date of September 1997 is tentative.
Establish full use of Internet technology	December 1997	No longer applicable. Upon review, DOE determined that this activity was a statement of intent and not a specific action.

^aThe initial target date is the date specified by DOE for completing the activity when the activity was first listed in the strategic plan.

^bDOE is developing an index known as the Universal Catalog that links training catalogs from DOE sites across the country. DOE intends to have all departmental training catalogs accessible through the Universal Catalog by October 1997. The Universal Catalog will be available through the Internet.

Table I.7: Status of Performance Goals Associated With DOE's December 1996 Strategic Training Implementation Plan

Performance goal	Initial target completion date	DOE-reported status (as of April 30, 1997)
Reduce the number of duplicate DOE and contractor training classes by 50 percent	March 1997	This goal has not been met. Classes for all sites must first be added to the Universal Catalog (scheduled for completion by October 1997) and then some analysis must be done to identify duplicate classes. A new due date for reducing the number of duplicate classes has not been set.
Achieve a greater than 50-percent customer satisfaction with DOE's pilot Center of Excellence	None specified	The goal is unlikely to be achieved this fiscal year, ending in September 1997. The pilot Center of Excellence is due to be fully functioning in July 1997, and a customer satisfaction survey could possibly be completed by December 1997.
Reduce DOE and contractor training expenditures by 15 percent in fiscal year 1997	End of fiscal year 1997	The goal is likely to be partially achieved. Training expenditures in fiscal year 1997 are projected to decrease by about 8 percent.

COMMENTS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

June 11, 1997

Mr. Victor S. Rezendes
Director, Energy, Resources, and Science Issues
U.S. General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20508

Dear Mr. Rezendes:

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the report titled Department of Energy: Status of Training Improvement Initiative (GAO/RCED-97-178R). The report focuses on the original implementation plan drafted in June 1995 and the Department's record of results against that plan. In response, we believe the report does not fully describe our actual accomplishments and how we have adapted the plan to meet new circumstances, and the Department's continuing commitment to improving the cost efficiency and effectiveness of training, education and development programs.

Accomplishments. Under the framework of the training improvement initiative, concurrently with the significant downsizing and reorganization activities of the Department, we have:

- o Reduced Departmental training costs for federal and contractor employees combined from \$554 million in FY 1995 to an expected expenditure of \$435 million in FY 1997, a total reduction of \$119 million (21% - figures include costs of employee time while in training).
- o Established a pilot Center of Excellence for environmental management training, education and development.
- o Implemented an Internet-based Clearinghouse for Training, Education, and Development that allows real-time access to training information for Federal and contractor employees and will have the capability to match existing training with employee needs Departmentwide.
- o Documented training expenditure baseline information in 1996, and updated it in 1997, for Federal and contractor employees Departmentwide.
- o Completed and put in place personnel technical qualification standards to support safe and efficient nuclear facilities operations.
- o Put in place a core technical group which will provide technical assistance to support implementation of the technical qualification standards for Federal personnel engaged in activities related to nuclear and occupational safety. Over 65 percent of the applicable qualification requirements have been met by the 1,800 employees covered by the requirements
- o Designated "lead sites" and deployed "lead site" developed study guides, computer based training, and training materials through the Clearinghouse to support the technical qualification of Federal personnel.

Changing Circumstances. While we have made significant progress in various components of the original plan, we were unable to meet a number of the milestones of the plan due to changing circumstances. These include (1) significant reductions in budget and training personnel resources, (2) the impact of Departmentwide downsizing and reorganization initiatives, and (3) changes in the way the Department contracts for performance-based management of our programs and facilities. As a consequence, we elected to modify the plan accordingly:

- o We formally revised and reissued the plan in December 1996 based on headquarters and field office concerns and recommendations about resource limitations and the ability to execute several cross-cutting commitments.
- o We will reschedule the customer assessment of the new pilot Center of Excellence for environmental management early in 1998 to allow the Center to operate for an appropriate length of time to permit a meaningful rating process to take place.
- o We are preparing a program change to address the overdue initiative to reduce the number of duplicate federal and contractor training courses, which will exploit the electronic Universal Training Catalogue (UNICAT) being deployed via the Clearinghouse; the proposal will be presented to the Training and Development Management Council in July 1997, and will build on related efforts already in progress at most of our sites.
- o We have integrated the original proposed training information system initiative into the new Departmental Corporate Human Resource Information System (CHRIS) which is now being deployed throughout the complex.
- o We analyzed the technologies available to support an expansion of our current distance learning capabilities and concluded they are not cost-effective in the near term.
- o We are currently working to include specific training and human resource development actions into the Department's new strategic plan to be completed in September 1997.

Meeting Additional Needs. While completing significant elements of the improvement plan, we have also had to meet additional demands and restraints:

- o To support career transition programs we have put in place career transition centers, provided career planning and retirement seminars, and instituted mentoring programs to assist redeployed and to-be-separated employees affected by workforce restructuring and downsizing.
- o In response to Congressionally mandated contract reform, we have designed and delivered new procurement and project management courses.
- o At the same time, we have adjusted to having significantly fewer Federal employees and program resources available to design and deliver training programs.

Next Steps. The Department's commitment to redesigning training development and delivery has not diminished:

- o The Training and Development Management Council will meet in July 1997 to review program progress to date and to affirm our new goals.
- o We will have two designated training Centers of Excellence by December 1997, and will continue to develop them as models for other Departmentwide organizations.

- o We are defining the requirements for the training information system module under CHRIS to be able to move as quickly as possible to implementation Departmentwide.
- o We will close "SAI-44: A Corporate Approach to Training", and issue a revised training improvement plan for FY 1998 and FY 1999 in support of the Department's new strategic plan.

The new training improvement plan will be the starting point for implementing a more focused initiative for FY 1998 and FY 1999. If you have any questions concerning these issues, please contact Thomas W. Evans, Director, Office of Training and Human Resource Development on 202-426-1506.

Sincerely,



Archer L. Durham
Assistant Secretary for
Human Resources and Administration

(141057)

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