

GAO  
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-10-275](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks raised concerns about the security of Department of Energy's (DOE) sites with weapons-grade nuclear material, known as Category I Special Nuclear Material (SNM). To better protect these sites against attacks, DOE has sought to transform its protective forces protecting SNM into a Tactical Response Force (TRF) with training and capabilities similar to the U.S. military. DOE also has considered whether the current system of separate contracts for protective forces at each site provides sufficiently uniform, high-quality performance across its sites.

Section 3124 of PL 110-181, the fiscal year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act, directed GAO to review protective forces at DOE sites that possess Category I SNM. Among other things, GAO (1) analyzed information on the management and compensation of protective forces, (2) examined the implementation of TRF, and (3) assessed DOE's two options to more uniformly manage DOE protective forces.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Energy develop plans to implement the DOE study group's recommendations—and, as needed, conduct research—to enhance protective forces' career longevity and retirement options. DOE generally agreed with the report and the recommendations.

View [GAO-10-275](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Gene Aloise at (202) 512-3841 or [aloisee@gao.gov](mailto:aloisee@gao.gov).

## NUCLEAR SECURITY

### DOE Needs to Address Protective Forces' Personnel System Issues

#### What GAO Found

Over 2000 contractor protective forces provide armed security for DOE and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) at six sites that have long-term missions to store and process Category I SNM. DOE protective forces at each of these sites are covered under separate contracts and collective bargaining agreements between contractors and protective force unions. As a result, the management and compensation—in terms of pay and benefits—of protective forces vary.

Sites vary in implementing important TRF requirements such as increasing the tactical skills of protective forces so that they can better “move, shoot, and communicate” as a unit. While one site has focused on implementing TRF requirements since 2004, other sites do not plan to complete TRF implementation until the end of fiscal year 2011. In addition, broader DOE efforts to manage postretirement and pension liabilities for its contractors have raised concerns about a negative impact on retirement eligibility and benefits for protective forces. Specifically, protective force contractors, unions, and DOE security officials are concerned that the implementation of TRF's more rigorous requirements and the current protective forces' personnel systems threaten the ability of protective forces—especially older members—to continue their careers until retirement age.

Efforts to more uniformly manage protective forces have focused on either reforming the current contracting approach or creating a federal protective force (federalization). Either approach might provide for managing protective forces more uniformly and could result in effective security if well-managed. Although DOE rejected federalization as an option in 2009 because it believed that the transition would be costly and would yield little, if any, increase in security effectiveness, the department recognized that the current contracting approach could be improved by greater standardization and by addressing personnel system issues. As a result, NNSA began a standardization initiative to centralize procurement of equipment, uniforms, and weapons to achieve cost savings. Under a separate initiative, a DOE study group developed a number of recommendations to enhance protective forces' career longevity and retirement options, but DOE has made limited progress to date in implementing these recommendations.

#### DOE Protective Force Members in Tactical Training



Source: DOE.