



Highlights of [GAO-06-1070](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The damage that unauthorized disclosure of classified information can cause to national security necessitates the prompt and careful consideration of who is granted a security clearance. However, long-standing delays and other problems with DOD's clearance program led GAO to designate it a high-risk area in January 2005. DOD transferred its investigations functions to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in February 2005. The Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Deputy Director for Management is coordinating governmentwide efforts to improve the clearance process. You asked GAO to examine the clearance process for industry personnel. This report addresses the timeliness of the process and completeness of documentation used to determine the eligibility of industry personnel for top secret clearances. To assess timeliness, GAO examined 2,259 cases of personnel granted top secret eligibility in January and February 2006. For the completeness review, GAO compared documentation in 50 randomly sampled initial clearances against federal standards.

What GAO Recommends

To improve the timeliness and completeness of investigations and adjudications, GAO is making several recommendations to OMB. OMB did not take exception to any of GAO's recommendations. OMB, DOD, and OPM each provided agency comments.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-1070.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Derek B. Stewart at (202) 512-5559 or stewartd@gao.gov.

DOD PERSONNEL CLEARANCES

Additional OMB Actions Are Needed to Improve the Security Clearance Process

What GAO Found

GAO's analysis of timeliness data showed that industry personnel contracted to work for the federal government waited more than one year on average to receive top secret clearances, longer than OPM-produced statistics would suggest. GAO's analysis of 2,259 cases in its population showed the process took an average of 446 days for initial clearances and 545 days for clearance updates. While OMB has a goal for the application-submission phase of the process to take 14 days or less, it took an average of 111 days. In addition, GAO's analyses showed that OPM used an average of 286 days to complete initial investigations for top secret clearances, well in excess of the 180-day goal specified in the plan that OMB and others developed for improving the clearance process. Finally, the average time for adjudication (determination of clearance eligibility) was 39 days, compared to the 30-day requirement that starts in December 2006. An inexperienced investigative workforce, not fully using technology, and other causes underlie these delays. Delays may increase costs for contracts and risks to national security. In addition, statistics from OPM, the agency with day-to-day responsibility for tracking investigations and adjudications, underrepresent the time used in the process. For example, the measurement of time does not start immediately upon the applicant's submission of a request for clearance. Not fully accounting for all the time used in the process hinders congressional oversight of the efforts to address the delays.

OPM provided incomplete investigative reports to DOD, and DOD personnel who review the reports to determine a person's eligibility to hold a clearance (adjudicators) granted eligibility for industry personnel whose investigative reports contained unresolved issues, such as unexplained affluence and potential foreign influence. In its review of 50 investigative reports for initial clearances, GAO found that almost all (47 of 50) cases were missing documentation required by federal investigative standards. At least half of the reports did not contain the required documentation in three investigative areas: residence, employment, or education. Moreover, federal standards indicate expansion of investigations may be necessary to resolve issues, but GAO found at least one unresolved issue in 27 of the reports. We also found that the DOD adjudicators granted top secret clearance eligibility for all 27 industry personnel whose investigative reports contained unresolved issues without requesting additional information or documenting that the information was missing in the adjudicative report. In its November 2005 assessment of the government plan for improving the clearance process, GAO raised concerns about the limited attention devoted to assessing quality in the clearance process, but the plan has not been revised to address the shortcomings GAO identified. The use of incomplete investigations and adjudications in granting top secret clearance eligibility increases the risk of unauthorized disclosure of classified information. Also, it could negatively affect efforts to promote reciprocity (an agency's acceptance of a clearance issued by another agency) being developed by an interagency working group headed by OMB's Deputy Director.