



Highlights of [GAO-07-105](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is responsible for licensing and inspecting the nation's nuclear power plants to ensure their safety and security. By 2010, about one third of NRC's workforce with mission-critical skills will be eligible to retire. At the same time, NRC's workforce needs to expand because NRC expects to receive at least 20 applications for 29 new nuclear power reactors beginning in October 2007. GAO assessed NRC's ability to meet its workforce needs by examining the extent to which NRC (1) has aligned its human capital planning framework with its strategic mission and programmatic goals; (2) is effectively recruiting, developing, and retaining critically skilled personnel; and (3) is addressing future uncertainties that could affect its overall workforce capacity. GAO examined strategic workforce planning and implementation documents, interviewed cognizant managers on NRC's human capital framework and activities, and surveyed these managers about NRC's human capital flexibilities and measures.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that NRC better (1) integrate its strategic human capital planning with its operations and (2) evaluate the effectiveness of its human capital flexibilities and measures. In commenting on a draft of the report, NRC agreed with GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-105.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jim Wells at (202) 512-3841 or wellsj@gao.gov.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Retirements and Anticipated New Reactor Applications Will Challenge NRC's Workforce

What GAO Found

NRC's human capital planning framework is generally aligned with its strategic goals and coherently identifies the activities needed to achieve the following strategic human capital outcomes: (1) continuous improvement in leadership and management effectiveness in delivering the mission and (2) a diverse, skilled workforce and an infrastructure that fully supports the agency's mission and goals. To integrate its human capital planning with implementation activities, NRC has recently completed or drafted three key planning documents and created a Human Capital Council in July 2006. However, it is too soon to tell whether implementation of these initiatives will stimulate, for example, the rate of knowledge transfer necessary for new staff to gain the critical skills they need to perform their regulatory responsibilities.

NRC has been effective in recruiting, developing, and retaining a critically skilled workforce to date, yet it is unclear whether this trend will continue in the next few years. For example, through improving such processes as how it implemented hiring for 60 different vacancy postings, NRC brought 371 employees on board during fiscal year 2006—a substantially higher number than in previous years. Similarly, NRC filled several critical skills gaps in 2006, yet it also identified many more new gaps in 2007 that require significant new hiring or training to fill. NRC has used various targets and measures to monitor its human capital progress, but could improve their application by gathering, analyzing, and sharing information about their usefulness among NRC's offices and revising some of them. Similarly, NRC may miss opportunities to most effectively apply human capital funding to recruit, develop, and retain a critically skilled workforce because NRC evaluates only some of its human capital flexibilities, such as recruitment incentives, in terms of the frequency and cost of their use.

NRC has acted to address two key uncertainties that affect its workforce needs: whether it can (1) maintain its workforce in the face of future competition for critically skilled workers and (2) accurately gauge its future workload. To better compete for workers, NRC tracks salaries in key disciplines to discern trends and is enhancing its university recruiting efforts. To handle the expected growth in reactor license applications, NRC has developed staffing and resource estimates, is reorganizing its affected workforce, and completed many elements of its review process for new reactors. Because of its workforce changes and anticipated increased workload, NRC needs flexibility, staff commitment, and sustained human capital management to adapt to any workforce climate shifts. Similarly, workload imbalances among employees and across offices could undermine employee satisfaction, making the recruiting and retention of a diverse, skilled workforce more difficult as expected industry competition intensifies. A failure to achieve these human capital goals could potentially hinder NRC's ability to inspect existing reactors and license new ones, which might ultimately limit the availability of electricity in the U.S. market.