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Top Stories

GAO Suggests Corrosion Prevention Should be Knitted into DoD's Cultural Fabric

DoD Corrosion Office Concur with Essence of GAO Report

By Cynthia Greenwood

Recently the Government Accountability Office (GAO) finished auditing the corrosion prevention efforts that the DoD Corrosion Office has overseen and funded since 2005. In its report, the GAO recommended that the DoD Corrosion Office and the Services treat the mission of corrosion prevention as an integral part of building and repairing DoD weapon systems and infrastructure.

To briefly summarize from the report, the GAO recommends that DoD should actively oversee annual funding requests of all military departments; that DoD should develop plans using a cost-of-corrosion baseline study; and that the department should direct each military department to require corrosion prevention control plans and assemble corrosion experts or "corrosion prevention advisory teams." In addition, the GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Services to designate corrosion executives or individual corrosion offices.

If these key GAO recommendations are put in place, military asset preservation would become an important focus of consideration and funding within each military department. The recommendations would also result in changes that could save taxpayers millions, if not billions of dollars, DoD officials say.

"In the Department of Defense we concur with the essence of the **GAO report** recommendations and thoroughly agree with two of the four recommendations," said Daniel J. Dunmire, the DoD primary action officer in charge of reviewing the GAO draft report and preparing a response on behalf of Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates.

In particular, the DoD agrees with GAO Recommendation 3, Dunmire said, which suggests that the DoD Corrosion Office be required to develop a future action plan for using the results of a *pioneering cost-impact study concerning the corrosion of Army ground vehicles and Navy ships*. "The Department of Defense concurs with this recommendation and the suggestion that the Services would do well to consider incorporating the cost-of-corrosion study findings into their fiscal budget cycles for fiscal year 2009 and 2010.

The DoD also agreed with GAO Recommendation 4, which would require major defense acquisition programs to come up with a corrosion prevention plan, while also putting a corrosion prevention advisory team as early as possible in the acquisition process. "We support this requirement," Dunmire said. "This recommendation supports Acquisition Category I (ACAT I) defense programs, such as the F-35 Lightning II and the formal Joint Strike Fighter. These are programs costing more than \$365 million in constant dollars in fiscal year 2000 for research and development and procurement; \$2.19 billion spent in constant dollars; or any program that is designated as such by the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition Technology and Logistics."

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In its response to GAO Recommendation 1, which directs the Services to provide data about their annual budget needs for corrosion to the DoD Corrosion Office *before* submitting monetary requests to Congress, DoD said that it partially agrees. Dunmire explained the DoD response to Recommendation 1: "A DoD Instruction requires that the Services submit information on their proposed corrosion programs and funding levels to the DoD Corrosion Executive. They are also asked to show us the methods they use to collect and submit data. But in our response we recognized that no program elements exist in the Services that are tied directly to corrosion, and many activities are funded to complete corrosion-related work but are not identified as such in budget documents."

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"The DoD expects that the Services will use the results from the ongoing cost impact study to pinpoint the top ten biggest cost drivers in each segment of their departments," Dunmire added. "In doing so they will have information that could make a difference on how much money should be budgeted for corrosion."

"However, the Services have to be given the freedom to make tradeoffs during the budget process," Dunmire emphasized. "In the DoD process there are more requirements than can possibly be funded. In each Service's budget process, corrosion has to be considered along with all other necessities. The cost of corrosion study will help us justify certain aspects of why certain things ought to be funded. And in no way are we mandating that the Services have to budget for corrosion."

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Finally, the DoD agrees with GAO Recommendation 2, concerning the appointing of a Corrosion Executive or Office in each Service. In its response, the agency explained how similar requirements had already been set forth in a DoD Instruction. The response noted that the Air Force had already designated a corrosion point of contact that funnels information about proposed corrosion programs to the DoD Corrosion Office. "But the DoD, however, does not agree with identifying the annual funding requirement for the same reason we outlined in our response to recommendation 1."

With respect to recommendations 1 and 2, Dunmire stressed that the Services must be given leeway to balance corrosion with their other requirements. "In no way is DoD telling the Services that they have to budget for corrosion."

The GAO report is titled *Defense Management: High Level Leadership Commitment and Actions Are Needed to Address Corrosion Issues*. For more information, or to obtain a copy of this report, please visit www.gao.gov and use access code GAO-07-618.