DOD Has Not Always Followed Leading Practices to Identify At-Risk Installations

What GAO Found

GAO found that the Department of Defense (DOD) does not have assurance that it is using reliable information regarding which installations are at risk for water scarcity. When comparing the results of six Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and military department assessments on installations vulnerable to water scarcity, GAO found that they varied markedly, raising questions about their quality and about which source of information DOD is using to determine which installations are vulnerable to water scarcity (see figure).

Installations Identified in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and Military Department Assessments as Being at Risk of Water Scarcity

An OSD official stated that the three OSD-produced assessments provided the best information available on which installations are at risk of water scarcity. However, GAO found that these assessments did not reflect four of five leading practices for identifying and analyzing water scarcity—practices that contribute to a reliable assessment of water availability. Specifically, OSD did not always (1) identify current water availability, (2) identify future water availability, (3) take into account all sources of water, or (4) precisely identify locations. Further, although GAO found that the three military department assessments aligned with all leading practices, OSD officials disagreed as to whether these assessments can and should be used to identify installations at risk of water scarcity across the defense enterprise. Until OSD resolves the question as to whether these assessments can and should be used to identify installations at risk of water scarcity across the defense enterprise, the department will not have assurance that it is using reliable information to assess water scarcity.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Office of the Secretary of Defense assess whether it should conduct a coordinated, department-wide assessment aligned with leading practices or rely on military department assessments to determine which DOD installations are at risk of water scarcity. DOD concurred with GAO’s recommendation.