GAO Highlights

NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION

NNSA Needs to Improve Its Program Management Policy and Practices

Why GAO Did This Study

The threat posed by the proliferation of nuclear and radiological weapons remains a pressing national security challenge. DNN implements nuclear nonproliferation programs worldwide. To carry out its mission, for fiscal year 2018 DNN requested an appropriation of about $1.5 billion for its 4 major programs and their 13 subprograms.

A House Armed Services Committee report, accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, included a provision for GAO to review and assess DNN's project and program management processes and systems. GAO's report examines the extent to which (1) selected DNN subprograms use program management leading practices to manage schedule and cost (2) DNN has incorporated leading practices in its revised program management policy.

GAO selected 4 DNN subprograms to review that had defined end dates and/or work scope and that GAO had not recently examined. GAO reviewed documentation on DNN and NNSA's program management policies and practices; reviewed selected leading practices published by PMI and GAO; and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DNN revise its program management policy to require DNN programs and subprograms to follow life-cycle program management, such as requiring life-cycle estimates and measuring against baselines. NNSA neither agreed nor disagreed with the recommendation but plans to take action to revise its policy.

View GAO-17-773. For more information, contact Shelby S. Oakley at (202) 512-3841 or oakleys@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The 4 selected subprograms from the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) Office of Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation (DNN) GAO reviewed generally do not use selected program management leading practices to manage schedule and cost. According to generally recognized leading practices from the Project Management Institute (PMI) and GAO, programs should (1) establish schedules necessary to achieve the program's goal, (2) establish life-cycle cost estimates, and (3) measure performance against schedule and cost baselines. However, none of the DNN subprograms have schedule and cost estimates covering their planned life cycles and none measure performance against schedule and cost baselines. The following figure illustrates the extent to which the selected subprograms have established schedule and cost estimates compared to their planned life cycles.

Extent of Selected Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation Subprograms' Schedule and Cost Estimates Compared to Their Planned Life Cycles
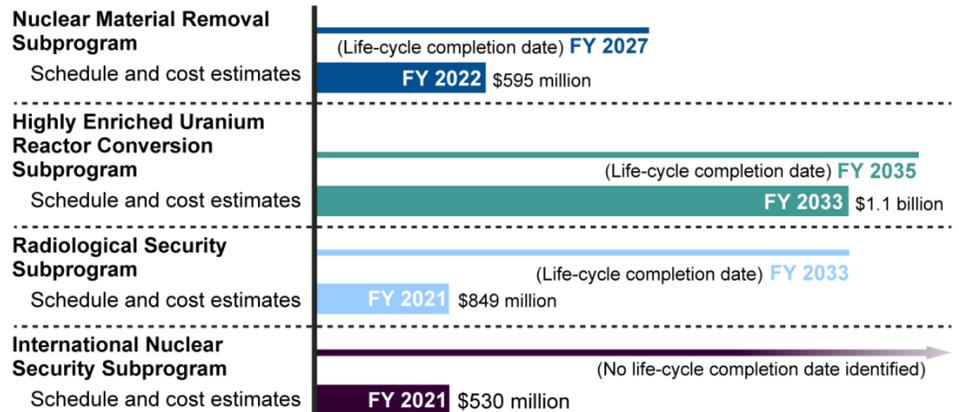
Source: GAO analysis of information from the National Nuclear Security Administration. | GAO-17-773

NNSA officials said that the subprograms do not have schedules and cost estimates that cover their life cycles and do not measure performance against baselines, in part, because DNN management does not require such estimates or baseline measurements.

The lack of a requirement is consistent with the limitations in DNN's revised program management policy, which does not address leading practices on establishing schedule estimates, estimating life-cycle costs, and measuring against such baselines. According to leading practices, in developing schedule and cost estimates a program should define assumptions tailored to the program such as its life-cycle phases. Updating the DNN policy to include requirements and guidance on cost estimating and tracking performance against schedule and cost baselines could help ensure that NNSA managers and Congress have better information on how much DNN programs and subprograms may cost, the time they may need to achieve their goals, and how effectively they are being executed compared to plans.

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United States Government Accountability Office