

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106861](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

NNSA relies on M&O contractors to help execute the agency's nuclear security missions. These contractors collectively employ around 55,000 people across the nuclear security enterprise, which includes production plants and laboratories. In 2023, the NNSA Administrator testified on, and a congressional commission highlighted, challenges M&O contractors face with workforce recruitment and retention, including a limited applicant pool for technically skilled positions.

A House Armed Services Committee report includes a provision for GAO to review NNSA's M&O contractors' recruiting and retention efforts. This report examines (1) M&O contractors' achievement of planned staffing levels, recruitment and retention challenges, and efforts to address challenges, and (2) how NNSA oversees M&O contractors' recruitment and retention efforts.

GAO analyzed agency and contractor documentation and workforce data and interviewed NNSA officials and M&O contractor representatives about challenges and oversight.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations for NNSA to (1) track the time it takes to review contractors' human resources requests and (2) fully assess and identify the information it needs to oversee M&O contractors' recruitment and retention efforts. NNSA concurred with both recommendations and stated it would take action to address them.

View [GAO-24-106861](#). For more information, contact Allison Bawden at (202) 512-3841 or bawdena@gao.gov.

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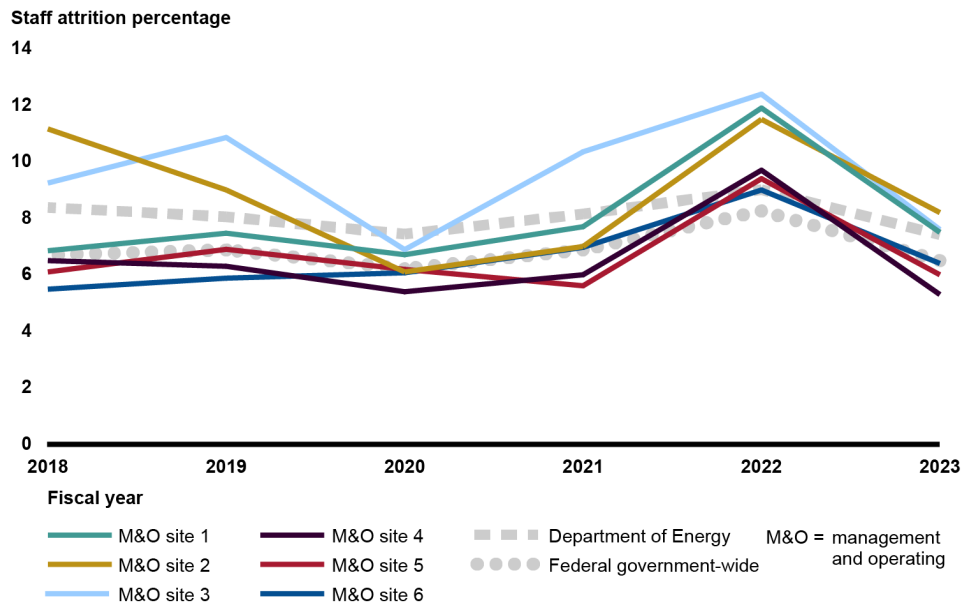
NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Improvements Needed for Overseeing Contractor Workforce Recruitment and Retention Efforts

What GAO Found

Data from the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) management and operating (M&O) contractors show they generally met planned staffing levels in fiscal years 2018 through 2022. The data also show that attrition rates—the number of employees who left divided by total employees—are comparable to government rates. These rates spiked in fiscal years 2021 and 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic when record numbers of people nationwide quit their jobs. Industry attrition rates are substantially higher but also include a larger employee population. M&O contractors cited challenges in recruiting and retaining employees, such as being able to offer competitive salaries and benefits. The contractors have taken steps to help address challenges. However, NNSA must review requests for changes to compensation or benefits that increase overall contract costs for cost reasonableness, and some contractor representatives cited the time it takes NNSA to review such requests as another challenge. NNSA officials aim to issue decisions about such requests within 60 days, but NNSA does not formally track review times. Such tracking would help NNSA determine if it is meeting its timeline or if it needs to adjust its review process.

M&O Contractor Attrition Rates Compared to Government Rates



Source: GAO analysis of M&O contractor and Office of Personnel Management data. | GAO-24-106861

To support its oversight, NNSA reviews information collected from M&O contractors. However, NNSA may be missing opportunities to use additional information that could inform its oversight of M&O contractors' recruitment and retention efforts. For example, NNSA does not collect information from exit surveys or time needed to fill certain positions—information that could help officials understand why contractors are requesting additional incentives. Fully assessing its information needs for oversight purposes could help NNSA improve its oversight of M&O contractors' recruitment and retention efforts.