

## GPS Accuracy Could Start Dropping in 2010

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A [report](#) is causing some concern that the GPS signal could become less accurate as soon as 2010.

The summary from the report reads:

It is uncertain whether the Air Force will be able to acquire new satellites in time to maintain current GPS service without interruption. If not, some military operations and some civilian users could be adversely affected. (1) In recent years, the Air Force has struggled to successfully build GPS satellites within cost and schedule goals; it encountered significant technical problems that still threaten its delivery schedule; and it struggled with a different contractor. As a result, the current IIF satellite program has overrun its original cost estimate by about \$870 million and the launch of its first satellite has been delayed to November 2009--almost 3 years late. (2) Further, while the Air Force is structuring the new GPS IIIA program to prevent mistakes made on the IIF program, the Air Force is aiming to deploy the next generation of GPS satellites 3 years faster than the IIF satellites. GAO's analysis found that this schedule is optimistic, given the program's late start, past trends in space acquisitions, and challenges facing the new contractor. Of particular concern is leadership for GPS acquisition, as GAO and other studies have found the lack of a single point of authority for space programs and frequent turnover in program managers have hampered requirements setting, funding stability, and resource allocation. (3) If the Air Force does not meet its schedule goals for development of GPS IIIA satellites, there will be an increased likelihood that in 2010, as old satellites begin to fail, the overall GPS constellation will fall below the number of satellites required to provide the level of GPS service that the U.S. government commits to. Such a gap in capability could have wide-ranging impacts on all GPS users, though there are measures the Air Force and others can take to plan for and minimize these impacts. In addition to risks facing the acquisition of new GPS satellites, the Air Force has not been fully successful in synchronizing the acquisition and development of the next generation of GPS satellites with the ground control and user equipment, thereby delaying the ability of military users to fully utilize new GPS satellite capabilities. Diffuse leadership has been a contributing factor, given that there is no single authority responsible for synchronizing all procurements and fielding related to GPS, and funding has been diverted from ground programs to pay for problems in the space segment. DOD and others involved in ensuring GPS can serve communities beyond the military have taken prudent steps to manage requirements and coordinate among the many organizations involved with GPS. However, GAO identified challenges to ensuring civilian requirements and ensuring GPS compatibility with other new, potentially competing global space-based positioning, navigation, and timing systems.