



Highlights of [GAO-03-481](#), a report to Congressional Committees

# RADIATION EXPOSURE COMPENSATION

## Funding to Pay Claims May Be Inadequate to Meet Projected Needs

### Why GAO Did This Study

On October 15, 1990, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) was enacted providing for payments to individuals who contracted certain cancers and other serious diseases presumably as a result of their exposure to radiation released during aboveground nuclear weapons tests or as a result of their employment associated with the uranium mining industry during the Cold War era.

The RECA Amendments of 2000 required that GAO report to the Congress on the Department of Justice's administration of RECA not later than 18 months after the enactment of the amendments and every 18 months thereafter. GAO originally reported on the status of the program in September 2001. The objectives of this report are to update information on claims processing, payments from the Trust Fund, and administrative expenses.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Attorney General consult with the congressional committees of jurisdiction to develop a strategy to address the gap between current funding levels and the amount of funding needed to pay claims projected to be approved over the 2003-2011 period.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-481](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-481).

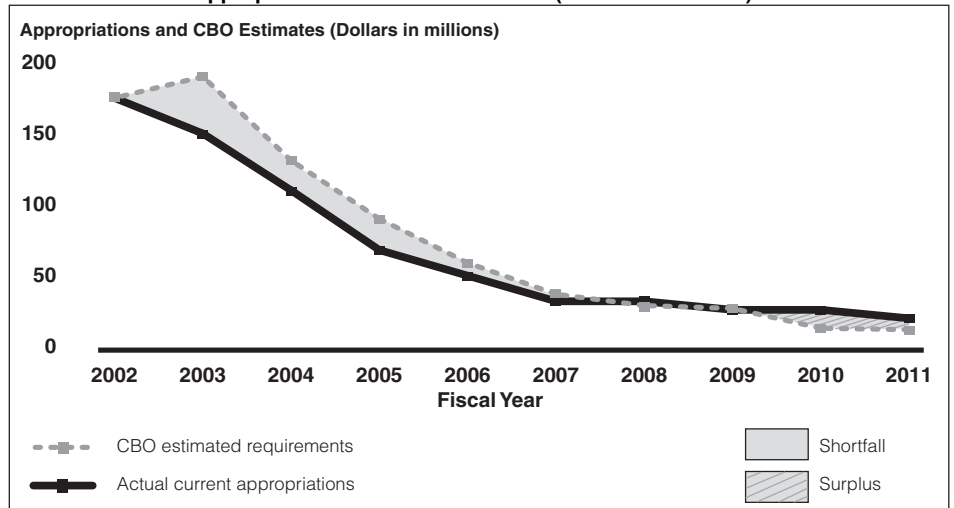
To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact, Paul L. Jones at (202) 512-8777 or [jonesp@gao.gov](mailto:jonesp@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

Since the enactment of the RECA Amendments of 2000, which expanded eligibility for benefits, the RECA program has experienced a significant increase in the number of claims filed. Claims also are taking longer to process, and the number of pending claims has grown sharply. Since we last reported in September 2001, claims have increased from 7,819 to 14,987. Pending claims have increased 300 percent, from 653 to 2,654. About 3,200 new claims are anticipated in fiscal year 2003. In addition, the average time to process claims increased for each category of claimant.

Given these circumstances, current funding for the RECA program to pay claims may be inadequate to meet projected needs. In fiscal year 2002, RECA was appropriated funds to cover a 10-year period—fiscal years 2002 through 2011 up to a specified amount per year—totaling \$655 million. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) estimate that funding levels appropriated to the Trust Fund are insufficient to meet the projected claims. As a result, claims may be delayed, particularly through 2007. Since 1993, funding for DOJ administration of the program has been provided in a separate appropriation account for Radiation Exposure Compensation administrative expenses. For fiscal years 2001 and 2002, the RECA program may have exceeded its appropriation for administrative expenses. According to a program budget official, the RECA program spent about \$100,000 in fiscal year 2001 and about \$1 million for fiscal year 2002 in administrative expenses over the \$1.996 million appropriated to the RECA expenses account in those fiscal years. For fiscal year 2003, Congress authorized DOJ's Civil Division to absorb any additional funding required for administrative expenses above the amount appropriated. However, the availability of additional funds, if needed, for administrative expenses is contingent on the Civil Division's ability to absorb any additional costs.

RECA Trust Fund Appropriations and CBO Estimates (Dollars in millions)



Source: The Congressional Budget Office data.