



Highlights of [GAO-05-721](#), a report to congressional requesters

CLEAN WATER ACT

Improved Resource Planning Would Help EPA Better Respond to Changing Needs and Fiscal Constraints

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal and state fiscal constraints may jeopardize past and future accomplishments resulting from the Clean Water Act (the act). In this environment, it is important to manage available resources as efficiently as possible and to identify future human capital needs, including the size of the workforce and its deployment across the organization. GAO was asked to determine (1) the extent to which the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) process for budgeting and allocating resources considers the nature and distribution of its Clean Water Act workload and (2) the actions EPA is taking to improve resource planning and the challenges the agency faces in doing so.

What GAO Recommends

Among other things, GAO recommends that EPA identify the key workload indicators that drive resource needs, ensure that relevant data are complete and reliable, and use the results to inform its budgeting and resource allocation. In commenting on a draft of this report, EPA expressed general agreement with much of the report and two of the recommendations. EPA did voice concern that a bottom-up workload assessment contrasts with its approach, which links budgeting and resource allocation to performance goals and results. GAO continues to believe that assessing workload and how it drives resource needs is fully compatible with EPA's approach.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-721.

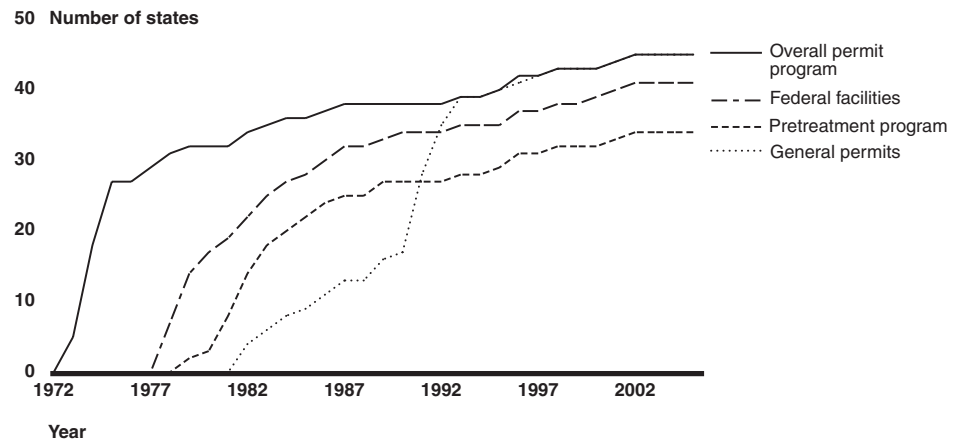
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact John B. Stephenson at (202) 512-3841 or stephensonj@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

EPA's process for budgeting and allocating resources is largely based on historical precedent and does not fully consider the changing nature or distribution of the workload either for specific environmental laws or the broader goals and objectives in the agency's strategic plan. With prior year's allocations as the baseline, year-to-year changes are marginal. EPA's program offices and regions also have some flexibility to realign resources based on actual workload. Overall, the impact of these changes is minor, according to EPA. Because the nature and distribution of the act's workload has changed as the scope of regulated activities has grown, with EPA gaining new responsibilities and shifting others to the states, more than marginal changes may be appropriate. EPA does not conduct the periodic "bottom-up" assessments of the work that needs to be done, the distribution of the workload, or the resources needed to respond more effectively to changing needs and constrained resources.

EPA has developed initiatives that could improve its ability to plan its resources more strategically, including efforts that focus on workforce planning. These efforts are promising but could be more effective if two agencywide initiatives were better coordinated and employee skill surveys were designed to identify gaps in needed skills. Beyond these initiatives, EPA faces larger challenges in adopting a more systematic process for budgeting and resource allocation, particularly in obtaining reliable data on key workload indicators. According to EPA officials, data on many of the factors that affect workload—and thus, drive resource needs—are not comprehensive or reliable. One of the biggest challenges will be assessing which of the workload indicators represent the most significant factors in determining resource needs. While this assessment presents a challenge, it would help EPA set priorities for improving data quality.

States Authorized to Issue Clean Water Act Permits



Source: EPA.