

GAO
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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-249](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Members of the Committee on Environment and Public Works and Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Environmental problems do not respect national boundaries. These problems include (1) climate change, (2) drought and the expansion of degraded land, (3) environmental cooperation among the countries of North America, (4) illegal trade in endangered species, and (5) substances that deplete the earth's protective ozone layer. To address such problems, the United States and other nations have entered into numerous international environmental agreements.

In implementing these agreements, the parties typically commit to establish domestic programs and report periodically on their progress. Developed nations like the United States may also pledge to provide funds to assist developing nations.

GAO was asked to examine (1) U.S. actions to fulfill its commitments under five international agreements identified by the requesters, (2) the means used to track these actions, and (3) the results of others' evaluations of these actions for the selected agreements.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-249

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

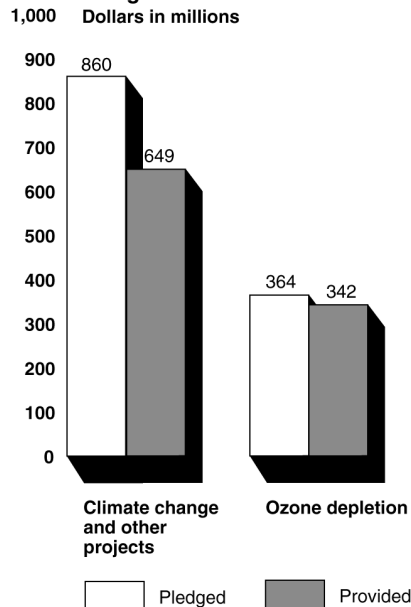
INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

U.S. Actions to Fulfill Its Commitments Under Five Key Agreements

What GAO Found

The United States is generally taking actions to meet its commitments under the five specified agreements. Federal agencies established domestic programs, reported periodically on progress, and provided funding to other nations. For example, the United States committed to stop producing and importing certain substances that deplete the earth's ozone layer by 1996 and did so. Although the United States did not make a treaty commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the President set a goal in 1993 to reduce emissions to their 1990 level by 2000 and the United States spends over \$1 billion a year to do so. However, U.S. emissions in 2001 exceeded the 1990 target level by about 12 percent. GAO also found that, while the United States provided \$1.4 billion between fiscal years 1991 and 2002 to assist other countries in addressing their environmental problems related to three agreements, it provided less than it pledged relating to two agreements. Specifically, the shortfall was 25 percent for the fund that finances climate change and other environmental projects and 6 percent for ozone depletion.

U.S. Funding to Other Nations Related to Two Agreements



Source: EPA and Treasury Department.

Federal agencies generally use informal means, such as meetings and informal communications, to track their actions to fulfill commitments under the five agreements. Officials at the Department of State and other agencies said informal means are effective and cost less than establishing a formal tracking system. The few studies that evaluated the effectiveness of U.S. actions concluded that the actions had positive effects on the environment. The agencies involved generally agreed with the facts presented in this report.