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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-1028](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) within the Department of Commerce manages the federal government's use of the radio frequency spectrum with coordination and policy input from the Interdepartment Radio Advisory Committee (IRAC), comprised of 20 federal agencies that use spectrum. In recent years, the use of spectrum in wireless applications has expanded dramatically, leading occasionally to contentious disputes between government and commercial users over access to spectrum. Considering IRAC's key role in spectrum management, Congress asked us to (1) describe the evolution of IRAC and (2) obtain IRAC agency representatives' assessment of IRAC's spectrum coordination and policy advice, role as an advisor, and whether IRAC needs to be reformed.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Secretary of Commerce: (1) seek IRAC's assistance in establishing a set of best practices for training and succession planning to guide agencies' participation in IRAC; and, (2) establish a special IRAC committee comprised of senior level agency officials as needed to provide policy advice on contentious spectrum policy issues. In commenting on the report, the Department of Commerce indicated that it would prefer that a senior level advisory group be convened outside of IRAC.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1028.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Mark L. Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or goldsteinm@gao.gov.

INTERDEPARTMENT RADIO ADVISORY COMMITTEE

IRAC Representatives Effectively Coordinate Federal Spectrum but Lack Seniority to Advise on Contentious Policy Issues

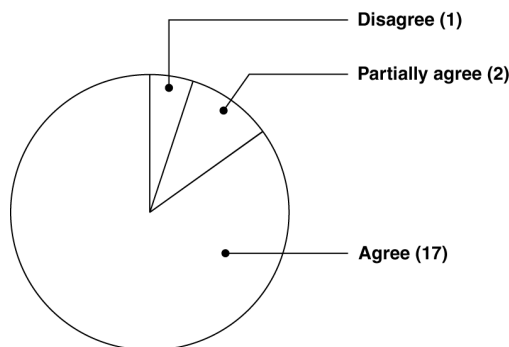
What GAO Found

The mission and placement of IRAC have evolved over time. IRAC began in 1922 by assisting in the assignment of frequencies to federal users and coordinating federal government spectrum use. In 1952, IRAC's mission was expanded to include responsibilities for formulating and recommending policies, plans, and actions for federal government spectrum use. Initially advising the Department of Commerce, IRAC has reported to or through various different entities, including at different times the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the Office of the President. Since 1978, IRAC has directly advised the Department of Commerce's NTIA. Currently, IRAC is comprised of a full committee, six standing subcommittees, and various ad hoc committees and working groups.

In interviews with GAO, IRAC agency representatives made the following key points in assessing IRAC:

- IRAC is effective in accomplishing spectrum coordination tasks, but its effectiveness is at times limited by representatives' uneven level of technical knowledge. This problem could worsen, as one-half of the 20 current IRAC representatives are currently eligible to retire.
- IRAC's ability to advise on national spectrum policy issues is limited because of representatives' lack of seniority within their agencies.

Most IRAC Representatives Agreed That the Formulation of National Spectrum Policy Must Occur at a More Senior Level Than Current IRAC Representatives



Source: GAO.

The chair of IRAC (an NTIA senior executive) is in agreement with representatives on these points. He said that he has gone outside IRAC directly to senior agency executives when he needed advice on contentious spectrum disputes such as those related to the introduction of new commercial communications services that would use federally controlled spectrum. A federal task force recently released a report that identified similar issues regarding IRAC's effectiveness and areas in need of reform.