



Highlights of [GAO-06-765](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The importance and widespread use of federal information makes its accuracy imperative. The Information Quality Act (IQA) required that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issue guidelines to ensure the quality of information disseminated by federal agencies by fiscal year 2003. GAO was asked to (1) assess OMB's role in helping agencies implement IQA; (2) identify the number, type, and source of IQA correction requests agencies received; and (3) examine if IQA has adversely affected agencies' overall operations and, in particular, rulemaking processes. In response, GAO interviewed OMB and agency officials and reviewed agency IQA guidelines, related documents, and Web sites.

What GAO Recommends

To help ensure that agencies covered by IQA meet requirements, GAO recommends that OMB's Director take actions to (1) work with DHS to help ensure it fulfills IQA requirements and set a deadline for doing so; (2) identify other agencies without IQA guidelines and work with them to develop and implement IQA requirements; and (3) clarify guidance to agencies on improving the public's access to online IQA information. OMB said it would continue working with DHS to develop departmentwide guidelines and with other agencies to develop their guidelines. OMB would also work with agencies to improve the online dissemination of IQA information.
www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-765.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-6806 or farrellb@gao.gov.

INFORMATION QUALITY ACT

Expanded Oversight and Clearer Guidance by the Office of Management and Budget Could Improve Agencies' Implementation of the Act

What GAO Found

OMB issued governmentwide guidelines that were the basis for other agencies' own IQA guidelines and required agencies to post guidelines and other IQA information to their Web sites. It also reviewed draft guidelines and undertook other efforts. OMB officials said that OMB primarily concentrated on cabinet-level and regulatory agencies, and 14 of the 15 cabinet-level agencies have guidelines. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) does not have department-level guidelines covering its 22 component agencies. Also, although the Environmental Protection Agency and 4 other independent agencies posted IQA guidelines and other information to their Web sites, 44 of 86 additional independent agencies that GAO examined have not posted their guidelines and may not have them in place. As a result, users of information from these agencies may not know whether agencies have guidelines or know how to request correction of agency information. OMB also has not clarified guidance to agencies about posting IQA-related information, including guidelines, to make that information more accessible. Of the 19 cabinet and independent agencies with guidelines, 4 had "information quality" links on their home pages, but others' IQA information online was difficult to locate.

From fiscal years 2003 to 2004, three agencies shifted to using IQA to address substantive requests—those dealing with the underlying scientific, environmental, or other complex information—which declined from 42 to 38. In fiscal year 2003, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and two other agencies used IQA to address flood insurance rate maps, Web site addresses, photo captions, and other simple or administrative matters. But, in fiscal year 2004, these agencies changed their classification of these requests from being IQA requests and instead processed them using other correction mechanisms. As a result, the total number of all IQA requests dropped from over 24,000 in fiscal year 2003 to 62 in fiscal year 2004. Also, of the 80 substantive requests that agencies received during the 2-year period—over 50 percent of which came from businesses, trade groups, or other profit-oriented organizations—almost half (39) of the initial agency decisions of these 80 were appealed, with 8 appeals resulting in changes.

The impact of IQA on agencies' operations could not be determined because neither agencies nor OMB have mechanisms to determine the costs or impacts of IQA on agency operations. However, GAO analysis of requests shows that agencies can take from a month to more than 2 years to resolve IQA requests on substantive matters. According to agency IQA officials, IQA duties were added into existing staff responsibilities and administering IQA requests has not been overly burdensome nor has it adversely affected agencies' operations, although there are no supporting data. But evidence suggests that certain program staff or units addressing IQA requests have seen their workloads increase without a related increase in resources. As for rulemaking, agencies addressed 16 correction requests related to rulemaking under the Administrative Procedure Act, not IQA.