Why GAO Did This Study

EPA’s mission is to protect human health and the environment. To accomplish this mission, EPA develops and enforces environmental regulations; awards grants; and studies environmental issues, among other things. GAO has conducted reviews focused on various aspects of EPA’s programs and operations. Through this work, GAO has made numerous recommendations to improve EPA’s performance and the efficiency and effectiveness of its programs and operations.

GAO continuously engages with executive branch agencies to ensure its recommendations are implemented. For example, GAO regularly follows up with agencies on its recommendations and posts their status online. Also, in 2015, GAO sent letters to the heads of key executive branch agencies, including EPA, identifying unimplemented recommendations that warrant priority attention.

This statement discusses (1) the status of EPA’s implementation of GAO recommendations for fiscal years 2006 through 2015 and how these recommendations relate to EPA programs and operations and (2) benefits realized by EPA based on GAO’s work, including through implementing GAO’s recommendations. It is based on GAO’s prior work from October 2005 through September 2015 and an analysis of recommendations GAO made to EPA during this period from data maintained in an internal database used to track the status of GAO recommendations.

GAO has identified many benefits—programmatic and process improvements and financial benefits—based on EPA taking actions on these recommendations and related work. For example, in 2010, GAO found that EPA had not maintained attention to children’s health issues through agency strategies and priorities since 2000. GAO recommended that EPA’s strategic plan expressly articulate children-specific goals, objectives, and targets. EPA agreed, and on September 30, 2010, EPA submitted its fiscal year 2011-2015 strategic plan to Congress, which included children’s health and environmental justice as a cross-cutting strategy, and children-specific goals. In addition, GAO has identified financial benefits from implementation of its recommendations and related work. For example, in 2008, GAO identified an error in EPA’s calculation of reimbursable indirect costs for hazardous waste cleanup. EPA acknowledged the error and published revised indirect costs rates. As a result, GAO estimated in 2010 that EPA had recovered or would recover $42.2 million.