

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-124](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The World Health Organization estimates that tobacco use kills over 7 million people each year, more than tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and malaria combined. Since the 1990s, Congress has enacted restrictions regarding the use of certain appropriated funds to promote U.S. tobacco exports.

GAO was asked to review the implementation of these restrictions. This report examines (1) guidance select U.S. agencies have issued to implement these restrictions, (2) whether overseas officials from select U.S. agencies were aware of the restrictions and guidance, and (3) select U.S. agencies' implementation of the guidance overseas. GAO reviewed U.S. laws, agency guidance, and internal communications; analyzed Commerce data; and interviewed agency officials in Washington, D.C. and in 24 offices across 11 overseas posts in 9 countries. GAO selected these countries based on criteria that included U.S. tobacco export totals, smoking rates, and geographic dispersion.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that (1) State and USDA include information about the funding restrictions and guidance in training materials for relevant employees and (2) State, in consultation with Commerce and USDA, assess and update the interagency guidance cable, as needed, on promoting tobacco in light of questions raised by officials at posts overseas. State and USDA concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-19-124](#). For more information, contact David Gootnick at (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov.

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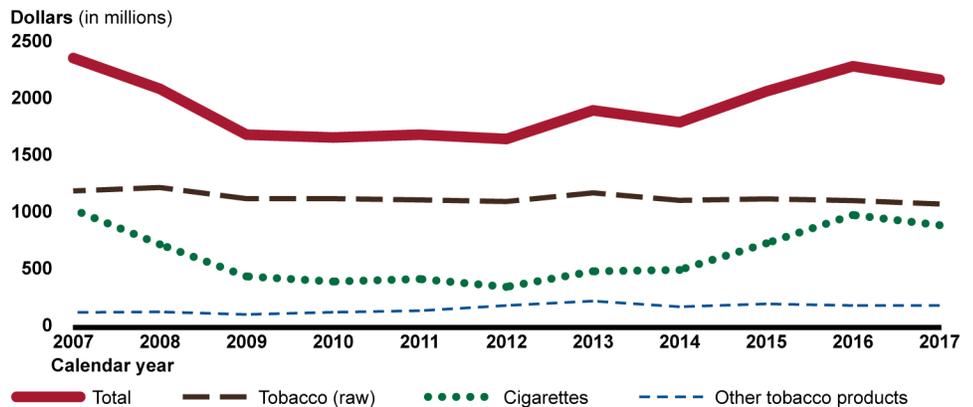
TOBACCO EXPORTS

Agencies Have Implemented Restrictions on Promoting Tobacco Overseas but Additional Actions Could Strengthen Their Efforts

What GAO Found

Congress has restricted the use of certain appropriated funding to promote tobacco exports and the Departments of State (State), Commerce (Commerce), and Agriculture (USDA) have issued interagency guidance through the cable system that they rely on to implement these restrictions. State collaborates with these and other agencies to periodically update this cable. The cable informs officials about the types of actions they should take—such as providing routine business facilitation services to all U.S. companies—and the types of actions they should not take—such as attending events sponsored by tobacco companies.

Trends in U.S. Tobacco Exports, 2007 through 2017



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. | GAO-19-124

Most, but not all, officials overseas that GAO interviewed were aware of the restrictions and received some guidance concerning the restrictions. However, GAO found that some officials did not recall receiving the interagency guidance cable. In addition, State and USDA's current training materials do not address the restrictions. Federal internal control standards state that appropriate training is essential to an organization's operational success. Thus, providing officials overseas with training about the funding restrictions and related guidance would help to ensure that officials are aware of the restrictions.

U.S. officials overseas have implemented restrictions on promoting tobacco, but some officials said that the interagency guidance lacks clarity. Officials said that they have not promoted tobacco by, for example, attending events sponsored solely by tobacco companies. However, officials identified three areas of the guidance that are unclear: (1) attendance at events not sponsored by U.S. tobacco companies but attended by representatives of these companies; (2) the types of services officials can provide tobacco companies; and (3) the description of tobacco products, such as whether component parts for electronic cigarettes are included. Federal standards for internal control state that management should clearly document internal controls in policies and guidance to prevent officials from failing to achieve an objective or address a risk. By providing more specific guidance, the agencies would help ensure that officials consistently implement the funding restrictions on promoting tobacco.