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Acting Comptroller General
of the United States

Accessible Version

June 15, 2026

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Priority Open Recommendations: Environmental Protection Agency

Dear Administrator Zeldin:

The purpose of this letter is to call your personal attention to two areas where open recommendations to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should be given high priority.

In January 2026, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 77 percent of our recommendations made 5 years ago were implemented.¹ EPA's recommendation implementation rate was 94 percent. As of April 2026, EPA has 77 open recommendations, including 8 priority recommendations.² Since our April 2025 letter, EPA implemented 1 priority recommendation.³ Fully implementing the remaining recommendations could significantly improve EPA's operations.

We are highlighting the following areas that warrant your timely and focused attention.

- **Managing the nation's air quality issues.** The nation's air quality has been negatively affected by some of the worst wildfire seasons on record, creating unhealthy smoke that has affected tens of millions of Americans. Under the Clean Air Act, EPA sets air quality standards at levels intended to protect public health, including the health of susceptible and vulnerable populations.⁴ We have identified actions EPA can take to better manage the nation's air quality issues. We [recommended](#), for example, that EPA establish goals for helping communities prepare for and respond to wildfire smoke events. Doing so would allow EPA to more effectively target its resources to the highest priorities. We also [recommended](#) that EPA develop a plan to modernize air quality monitoring. Doing so would help EPA better position the national ambient air quality monitoring system to provide critical information for managing air quality and protecting public health.
- **Protecting the nation's water quality.** Over the past 50 years, the quality of our nation's waters and drinking water has improved. However, threats to water quality and safety

¹GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2025*, [GAO-26-900644](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 29, 2026).

²GAO considers a recommendation to be a priority if when implemented, it may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

³GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Environmental Protection Agency*, [GAO-25-108095](#) (Washington, D.C.: April 30, 2025). In this letter, we identified 9 priority recommendations. EPA implemented 1 of these [recommendations](#) in April 2026 by establishing a process for conducting an organization-wide cybersecurity risk assessment.

⁴42 U.S.C. § 7409.

remain, and we recommended additional actions EPA should take to address these threats. One of these threats is harmful algal blooms, the overgrowth of algae in water bodies that can produce toxins and contribute to hypoxia (low oxygen conditions) that can harm humans and animals. We [recommended](#) that EPA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration define and document a national program for understanding, detecting, predicting, controlling, mitigating, and responding to marine and freshwater harmful algal blooms and hypoxia. Doing so could further federal efforts to manage risks posed by harmful algal blooms and hypoxia.

In addition to these two areas, EPA should continue to work on [transforming EPA's process for assessing and managing chemical risks](#). We added this issue to our [High Risk List](#) in 2009 because EPA had not developed sufficient risk information to limit exposure to many chemicals that may pose substantial health risks.⁵ To make additional progress in this high risk area, attention to [resources \(budgetary and staffing\)](#), [strategic planning](#), and [monitoring](#) is needed. Several government-wide high risk areas also have direct implications for EPA and its operations, including [ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation](#) and [strategic human capital management](#). We also identified actions EPA should take to reduce fragmentation, overlap, and duplication. For example, we reported that EPA, in conjunction with other agencies, could better manage fragmentation among federal efforts to reduce textile waste by establishing an [interagency mechanism](#) to coordinate such efforts. More information on our [Duplication and Cost Savings](#) work can be found on the GAO website.

A comprehensive list of open recommendations, including priority recommendations, and information about their status can be found on the GAO website at [Recommendations Database | U.S. GAO](#). Copies of this letter are being sent to the appropriate congressional committees.⁶ This letter will also be available at [Priority Recommendations | U.S. GAO](#).

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss how to address our open recommendations, as we pursue the shared goal of working to increase efficiency and effectiveness of government programs and spending. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Allison Bawden, Managing Director, Natural Resources and Environment, at bawdena@gao.gov. Contact points for our

⁵This list identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, [GAO-25-107743](#) (Washington, D.C.: February 25, 2025).

⁶We also help Congress identify congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022) (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 719 note). Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on agencies' progress in implementing priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act.

Offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this letter. Thank you for your personal attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General
of the United States