

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105445](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

In support of CPSC's product safety mission, agency investigators examine consumer products entering certain U.S. ports. To protect worker safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, CPSC's leadership withdrew investigators from these ports in March 2020. As a result, CPSC was largely unable to conduct in-person examinations of imported products until investigators began returning to ports in September 2020.

GAO was asked to review CPSC's withdrawal of investigators during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the CARES Act requires GAO to report on ongoing monitoring and oversight efforts related to COVID-19. This report examines, among other objectives, (1) CPSC's risk mitigation strategies and the extent to which CPSC had emergency plans, and (2) CPSC's implementation of COVID-19-related statutory requirements.

GAO analyzed CPSC documentation; reviewed relevant laws and regulations, including requirements for federal agency continuity of operations plans; interviewed officials at CPSC headquarters and three selected ports and other selected agencies that perform similar inspections; and analyzed data on CPSC examinations and international trade volume.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that CPSC (1) finalize its continuity of operations plans, and (2) fully develop and implement actionable steps and set specific milestones for complying with the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. CPSC concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105445](#). For more information, contact Alicia Puentes Cackley at (202) 512-8678 or cackleya@gao.gov.

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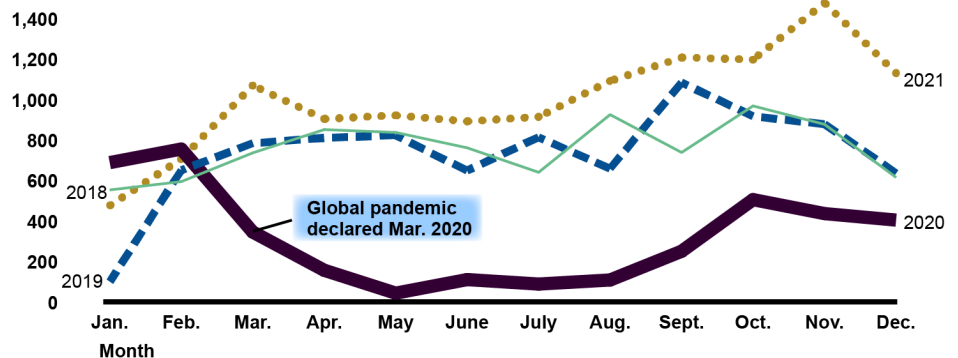
CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION

Action Needed to Improve Preparedness for Product Examination Disruptions

What GAO Found

The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) implemented remote examination procedures in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the period when all CPSC investigators worked remotely—March through August 2020—investigators conducted significantly fewer examinations of consumer products than during similar periods in prepandemic years. Specifically, port investigators conducted 850 examinations during this period compared to 4,537 in March through August 2019 (see figure). Monthly examinations returned to prepandemic levels in early 2021, although the trade value of imported consumer products had returned to prepandemic levels in July 2020. CPSC also identified significantly fewer import violations for consumer products during the period its port staff worked off-site—187 violations between March and August 2020, compared to 1,413 during the same period in 2019.

CPSC Examinations of Shipment Entries by Month, 2018–2021
Number of examinations



Source: GAO analysis of Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) examination data. | GAO-23-105445

CPSC did not have a finalized continuity of operations plan prior to the pandemic, and had not assessed catastrophic emergency risks, as required by federal directives. As a result, CPSC made decisions regarding continuity of operations at the ports and its remote procedures as conditions evolved. The scope of products CPSC examined when port investigators were withdrawn was limited. Remote procedures also did not account for differences across ports, such as the types of products arriving at individual ports. This led to variations in the number of examinations investigators conducted while working remotely compared to examinations conducted prepandemic at selected ports. No examinations were conducted at one of these ports during the withdrawal period. By finalizing a comprehensive continuity of operations plan, CPSC would be better prepared for disruptions from future emergencies.

CPSC has taken steps to implement COVID-19-related requirements in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. However, it has not addressed two specific requirements to (1) examine a sample of de minimis shipments (valued at \$800 or less) for violations of standards and (2) develop performance metrics for its efforts to reduce noncompliant de minimis shipments. As a result, CPSC's ability to detect and report on noncompliant de minimis shipments, typically found in the growing e-commerce environment, is limited.