

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107171](#), a report to the Chair, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2024, about 327,000 miners worked at nearly 12,700 U.S. mines. By law, U.S. mines must undergo routine inspections to ensure they meet federal health and safety standards. The Commission reviews legal disputes about violations of these standards. It has an \$18 million budget and about 60 employees.

GAO was asked to review the Commission's operations and oversight. This report examines (1) how the Commission is addressing management weaknesses and (2) the challenges it has faced accessing independent oversight and options that exist to obtain support from an IG.

GAO reviewed Commission documents and external audits and interviewed agency officials and federal and industry stakeholders. GAO also assessed the Commission's performance against relevant federal laws, regulations, and internal control standards. In addition, GAO interviewed several investigative agencies, IGs, and other federal stakeholders about strategies for agencies to access independent oversight.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Congress consider authorizing another agency's IG to also serve as the Commission's Inspector General. GAO is also making eight recommendations to the Commission to address management weaknesses, including those related to performance management, workforce planning, and other internal control deficiencies. The Commission agreed with GAO's recommendations and described planned actions to address them.

View [GAO-25-107171](#). For more information, contact Thomas Costa at CostaT@gao.gov.

September 2025

MINE SAFETY

Commission That Reviews Legal Disputes Needs Improved Management Oversight

What GAO Found

The Federal Mine Safety and Health Review Commission (Commission) has not addressed numerous management and operational weaknesses. According to senior officials, Commission leaders have often been disengaged from administering the Commission's operations and have generally not addressed key challenges faced in carrying out its administrative functions. GAO identified a range of challenges, including:

- **Agency performance management.** The Commission has not fully incorporated key practices for managing its performance. Although it has established long-term goals in its strategic plan, the Commission does not have ways to measure progress toward most of those goals or consistently use reliable performance data to set new goals. Officials said that current and past Commission chairs were not fully aware of performance management requirements. As a result, the Commission is missing opportunities to improve its effectiveness and efficiency.
- **Workforce planning.** The Commission lacks a comprehensive workforce plan, which would help address the Commission's operational challenges and future staffing needs. Officials acknowledged that the Commission lacks staff with human capital, financial, and other key skills, but it has not filled those gaps. The Commission also faced performance challenges due to several Administrative Law Judge retirements. One senior official told us the Commission lacks a succession plan even though all judges have been eligible to retire since 2022.
- **Other internal control deficiencies.** The Commission has not addressed several internal control deficiencies to improve its operations. For example, the Commission's 2024 financial audit found an inadequate budget approval process, but a senior Commission official said the Commission could not fully address that deficiency without additional skilled personnel, and they do not have a plan to hire those personnel. In addition, the Commission has not established processes to manage its risks, ensure it is complying with relevant laws and regulations, or address other deficiencies.

Since 2021, the Commission has sought, with limited success, oversight for a variety of alleged improprieties and personnel matters. Many federal agencies have an Inspector General (IG) to investigate such allegations, but the Commission lacks an IG and instead sought assistance from several third parties. The Commission received limited investigative support from an external IG and the Office of Special Counsel. However, the Commission was unable to secure assistance to investigate allegations of improper procurement activities against a senior official, who remained on paid administrative leave for more than 3 years. Given the Commission's challenges obtaining oversight support, it would benefit from having an IG designated in statute. The IG could be from a larger agency with related expertise and should be provided with appropriate resources to take on Commission oversight.