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Washington, DC 20548

Acting Comptroller General  
of the United States

June 25, 2026

The Honorable Ho K. Nieh  
Chairman  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
Mail Stop O-16 B33  
Washington, DC 20555-0001

### Priority Open Recommendations: Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Dear Chairman Nieh:

The purpose of this letter is to call your personal attention to three areas where open recommendations to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) 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.<sup>1</sup> NRC's recommendation implementation rate was 100 percent. As of May 2026, NRC has 26 open recommendations, including 11 priority recommendations.<sup>2</sup> Since our May 2025 letter, NRC has not implemented any priority recommendations.<sup>3</sup> Fully implementing these open priority recommendations could significantly improve NRC's operations.

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

- **Addressing the security of radiological sources.** NRC is responsible for regulating the use of nuclear materials through licensing, inspection, and enforcement of its requirements. This includes issuing licenses to people and organizations that need to possess radioactive material. However, NRC has not added security features to ensure only valid licenses are used to purchase high-risk radioactive materials, as we [recommended](#). Ensuring the security of these sources will reduce the risk that a bad actor can use an altered or forged license to acquire enough radioactive material to create a dirty bomb.
- **Improving risk-informed decision-making.** NRC's oversight processes include addressing safety risks at nuclear facilities, including natural hazards that can damage systems and

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

<sup>2</sup>GAO 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.

<sup>3</sup>GAO, *Open Priority Recommendations: Nuclear Regulatory Commission*, [GAO-25-108097](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 5, 2025). In this letter, we identified nine priority recommendations. Since then, we added two new priority recommendations.

equipment. However, NRC mostly uses historical data to identify and assess safety risks, rather than data from future climate projections. We recommended that NRC [develop guidance](#) for incorporating climate projections data into its licensing and oversight processes. Doing so will help ensure that NRC uses the best available information to adequately address climate risks to nuclear power plants. This will better enable NRC to fulfill its mission to protect public health and safety.

- **Licensing advanced nuclear reactors.** NRC expects an increase in licensing applications for advanced nuclear reactors that may provide benefits like faster and cheaper electricity production. NRC has begun updating its regulations and processes to include these reactors—but has had difficulty hiring and retaining the staff needed to license them. We recommended that NRC evaluate its recruitment and retention incentives for hard-to-fill positions. Implementing this [recommendation](#) will help ensure NRC has sufficient knowledgeable staff to conduct licensing reviews in the coming years.

One of these areas—[improving risk-informed decision-making](#)—is also included on GAO’s [High Risk List](#).<sup>4</sup> Several other government-wide high risk areas have direct implications for NRC and its operations, including [strategic human capital management](#). We also identified actions to reduce fragmentation, overlap, and duplication at NRC. For example, we reported that [Congress should consider](#) directing NRC to update its security measures for category 3 radioactive materials, which are dangerous enough to cause permanent human injury, to help better manage federal agencies’ fragmented radiological security efforts. More information on our [Duplication and Cost Savings](#) work can be found on the GAO website.

A comprehensive list of open recommendations, including new 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.<sup>5</sup> This letter will also be available at [Priority Recommendations | U.S. GAO](#).

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<sup>4</sup>This 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).

<sup>5</sup>We 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.

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 Team at [BawdenA@gao.gov](mailto:BawdenA@gao.gov). Contact points for our 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

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