

Why GAO Did This Study

Exhaust from diesel engines is a harmful form of air pollution. EPA has issued emissions standards for new diesel engines and vehicles, but older mobile sources of diesel emissions—such as trucks and buses—continue to emit harmful pollution. Programs at DOE, DOT, and EPA provide funding for activities that reduce diesel emissions, such as retrofitting existing diesel engines and vehicles. The existence of these programs at multiple agencies has raised questions about the potential for unnecessary duplication. In response to a mandate in the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act of 2010, GAO examined the (1) extent of duplication, overlap, fragmentation, or gaps, if any, among federal grant, rebate, and loan programs that address mobile source diesel emissions; (2) effectiveness of federal funding for activities that reduce mobile source diesel emissions; and (3) extent of collaboration among agencies that fund these activities. GAO analyzed program data, documents, and relevant laws and regulations and interviewed agency officials. GAO also reviewed three diesel-related tax expenditures.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOT's Federal Transit Administration develop performance measures for its two relevant strategic goals and that DOE, DOT, and EPA establish a strategy for collaboration among their programs that fund activities that reduce diesel emissions. DOE and EPA agreed with the relevant recommendation, and DOE questioned several findings. DOT questioned several findings and both recommendations and neither agreed nor disagreed with the recommendations. GAO continues to believe in the need for the performance measures and collaboration.

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DIESEL POLLUTION

Fragmented Federal Programs That Reduce Mobile Source Emissions Could Be Improved

What GAO Found

Federal grant and loan funding for activities that reduce mobile source diesel emissions is fragmented across 14 programs at the Department of Energy (DOE), the Department of Transportation (DOT), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). From fiscal years 2007 through 2011, the programs obligated at least \$1.4 billion for activities that have the effect of reducing mobile source diesel emissions. The programs have varying goals and purposes; nevertheless, each program allows or requires a portion of its funding to support activities that reduce mobile source diesel emissions, such as replacing fleets of older diesel trucks or school buses with natural gas vehicles. In addition, each of the 14 programs overlaps with at least one other program in the specific activities they fund, the program goals, or the eligible recipients of funding. GAO also identified several instances of duplication where more than one program provided grant funding to the same recipient for the same type of activities. However, GAO was unable to determine whether unnecessary duplication exists because of limited information on program administrative costs, among other things. GAO did not find any gaps among the programs, such as mobile sources that are not eligible for funding.

The effectiveness of federal funding for activities that reduce mobile source diesel emissions is unknown because agencies vary in the extent to which they have established performance measures. DOE and EPA have established performance measures for the strategic goals related to their programs that reduce mobile source diesel emissions. DOT has established such measures for two of its administrations—the Federal Aviation Administration and Federal Highway Administration—but has not established such measures for the Federal Transit Administration for two of the four strategic goals that link to its programs that fund diesel emissions reduction activities. Instead, agency officials said they collect information on the current condition of the nation's transit fleet, among other things, to measure the performance of its programs. As GAO has previously reported, principles of good governance indicate that agencies should establish quantifiable performance measures to demonstrate how they intend to achieve their goals and measure the extent to which they have done so. In addition, 13 of the 14 programs have purposes other than decreasing diesel emissions, and diesel reductions are a side benefit of efforts to achieve these other goals. As a result, few programs collect diesel-related performance information. Incomplete performance information may limit the ability of agencies to assess the effectiveness of their programs and activities that reduce diesel emissions.

The programs that fund activities that reduce diesel emissions generally do not collaborate because of the differing purposes and goals of each program, according to senior DOE, DOT, and EPA officials. The officials also were sometimes unaware of other programs that fund similar activities and said that any existing collaboration was on a case-by-case basis. GAO's previous work has shown that although federal programs have been designed for different purposes, coordination among programs with related responsibilities is essential to efficiently and effectively meet national concerns. Further, without a coordinated approach, programs can waste scarce funds, confuse and frustrate program customers, and limit the overall effectiveness of the federal effort.