

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-106253](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

More than 1,000 facilities across the nation treat, store, and dispose of hazardous waste that could harm human health and the environment if released. Natural hazards such as flooding—which may become more frequent and intense due to climate change—can lead to hazardous waste releases. RCRA governs the management of hazardous waste by facilities. EPA promulgates RCRA regulations to minimize the risk of releases from facilities and has authorized 48 states to implement these regulations in lieu of EPA. EPA regional offices assist and oversee states in implementing RCRA.

GAO was asked to review EPA's role in addressing climate risks to facilities. This report examines 1) the extent to which facilities are located in areas with selected natural hazards that may be exacerbated by climate change; 2) the extent to which EPA requires or encourages authorized states and facilities to manage risks to human health and the environment from climate change; and 3) challenges EPA, states, and facilities face in managing climate risks. GAO analyzed federal data on facilities and four natural hazards, reviewed agency documents, and interviewed officials from EPA headquarters and five regional offices, four state agencies, and eight stakeholder groups.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making nine recommendations to EPA, including that it provide training and technical assistance and assess issuing regulations to clarify requirements and provide direction on managing facility climate risks. EPA agreed with our recommendations.

View [GAO-25-106253](#). For more information, contact J. Alfredo Gomez at (202) 512-3841 or gomezj@gao.gov.

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HAZARDOUS WASTE

EPA Should Take Additional Actions to Encourage Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facilities to Manage Climate Risks

What GAO Found

Federal data on flooding, wildfires, storm surge, and sea level rise indicate that more than 700 hazardous waste treatment, storage, and disposal facilities, or about 68 percent, are located in areas with one or more of these hazards that could be exacerbated by climate change.

Hazardous Waste Storage Tanks at a Treatment, Storage, and Disposal Facility



Source: Photo used with permission. Source withheld. | GAO-25-106253

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regions, authorized states, and facilities need more clarity on whether managing climate risks to facilities is required or there is existing authority to do so under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976, as amended (RCRA). EPA has taken steps to clarify authorities and requirements for managing climate risks as part of permitting but has not done so for compliance and enforcement efforts, such as inspections. In June 2024, EPA issued guidance on selected RCRA authorities that regions and states could use to develop facility permit requirements to manage climate risks. However, some states and facilities may not implement the guidance unless EPA amends regulations to explicitly clarify authorities and requirements. EPA officials said the agency could provide training and technical assistance to regions and states to help ensure they understand and implement the guidance, but EPA has not done so yet. Without providing this training and technical assistance and seeking further feedback to determine whether it should issue regulations to fully clarify authorities and requirements for managing climate risks, EPA may be unable to ensure effective and consistent management of these risks.

EPA regions, states, and facilities also face challenges in managing climate risks. For example, regions, states, and facilities need guidance on how to assess climate risks and face challenges in knowing what data they should use to do so, according to interviews with officials from EPA, states, and stakeholder groups. By issuing guidance to regions, states, and facilities on how to manage climate risks, along with providing data, tools, and training, EPA could better ensure these risks are managed sufficiently and that regions, states, and facilities have the direction and information necessary to do so.