

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107165](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

While consumers and businesses have options to donate, repurpose, and repair used textiles in the U.S., the majority are discarded into municipal waste streams, according to EPA. The rise in fast fashion has highlighted concerns about textile waste and textile recycling in the U.S., according to EPA officials.

GAO was asked to review issues related to textile waste and recycling. This report describes (1) how textile waste affects the environment; (2) how and why the rate of textile waste in the U.S. has changed in the last 2 decades; and (3) federal actions to reduce textile waste and advance textile recycling, and what opportunities exist for entities to collaborate.

GAO reviewed laws, agency documents and data, and leading practices for interagency collaboration. GAO interviewed federal officials, representatives from industry, and other nonfederal stakeholders, such as officials from two state agencies and nonprofit organizations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Congress consider providing direction to a federal entity (or entities) to coordinate and take federal action to reduce textile waste and advance textile recycling. GAO is also making 7 recommendations to 6 federal entities, including that they coordinate through an interagency mechanism that follows leading practices. One entity, on behalf of the 6 entities, agreed with the findings but disagreed with coordinating through an interagency mechanism. GAO maintains the recommendations are valid.

View [GAO-25-107165](#). For more information, contact J. Alfredo Gómez at (202) 512-3841 or gomezj@gao.gov.

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TEXTILE WASTE

Federal Entities Should Collaborate on Reduction and Recycling Efforts

What GAO Found

Textile waste—discarded apparel and products such as carpets, footwear, and towels—causes harmful effects to the environment, according to academic and federal reports GAO reviewed. These effects include the release of greenhouse gases and the leaching of contaminants into soil and water as textile waste decomposes in landfills. While data on textile waste are limited, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) textile waste data estimates an over 50 percent increase between 2000 and 2018 in the U.S. According to federal, academic, nonprofit, and industry sources, textile waste has increased because of multiple factors, including a shift to a fast fashion business model; limited, decentralized systems for collecting and sorting textiles; and the infancy of textile recycling technologies.

Examples of Discarded Textiles



Sources: Helpsy Holdings PBC (left photo); GAO (right photo). | GAO-25-107165

Some federal entities have initiated and planned a number of efforts to reduce textile waste and advance textile recycling. For example, the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology led a workshop on reducing textile waste in 2021 with participants from industry, academia, government, and trade associations, among others, and is researching methods for textile recycling. The U.S. Department of State leads an informal interagency group focused on extending the life of products and materials; this group held a March 2024 meeting focused on textiles. EPA plans to develop a national textile recycling strategy within 5 to 10 years, according to officials.

GAO found that most federal entities' efforts are nascent, and their approach depends on their mission and expertise. Further, federal entities carry out individualized efforts on textile waste and recycling and give these efforts a lower priority than other goals. GAO identified opportunities for interagency collaboration to improve these efforts. In 2022, some federal entities took steps to formalize an interagency group, but these efforts have stopped. Interagency collaboration that follows leading practices for enhancing and sustaining collaboration could leverage resources to improve the federal government's capacity to reduce textile waste and advance textile recycling.