



Highlights of [GAO-05-537](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The vast majority of U.S. exports are covered by at least one trade agreement. Ensuring that U.S. companies can take advantage of the market opportunities created by trade agreements has therefore become a critical responsibility for U.S. government agencies.

GAO examined U.S. government efforts to monitor and enforce trade agreements. Specifically, GAO (1) reviewed how the nature and scope of U.S. trade agreements has changed in the last 10 years and what effect changes had on agencies' monitoring and enforcement workload, (2) evaluated how U.S. government agencies monitor and enforce trade agreements, and (3) analyzed how the U.S. government allocates resources for monitoring and enforcement of trade agreements within the context of other trade activities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that agencies (1) take steps to facilitate communication on trade issues, (2) develop a strategy for improving trade compliance training, and (3) develop a resource strategy for monitoring and enforcing trade agreements. The Departments of Agriculture and State generally concurred with GAO's recommendations. The Department of Commerce offered comments to clarify certain facts. USTR provided technical comments.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-537.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Loren Yager at (202) 512-4347 or yagerl@gao.gov.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

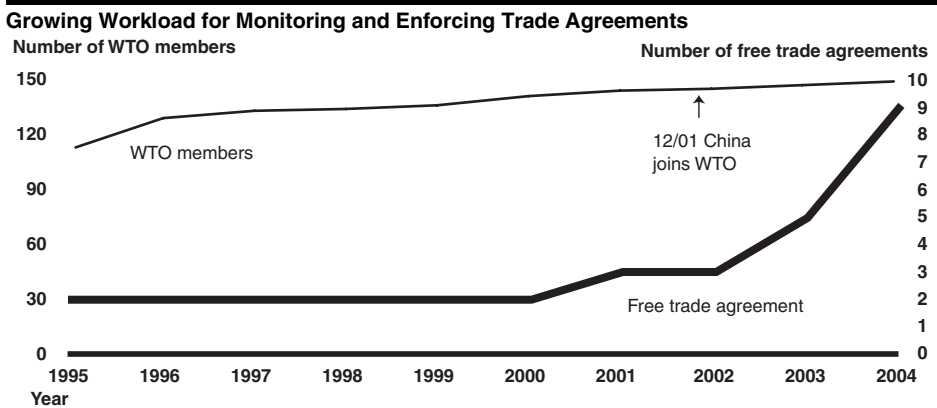
Further Improvements Needed to Handle Growing Workload for Monitoring and Enforcing Trade Agreements

What GAO Found

The number and scope of trade agreements have grown significantly in recent years, increasing the monitoring and enforcement workload for federal agencies. For example, membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) has grown over 30 percent in the past 10 years. In addition, trade agreements increasingly cover complex subjects like intellectual property and technical standards. As a result, the amount of work needed to ensure countries comply with such agreements has increased.

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) and the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, and State generally monitor market access issues brought to the agencies' attention by complaints from the private sector or that they identify themselves. They also monitor countries' compliance with certain trade agreements. Over the past 5 years, agencies with trade responsibilities have taken steps to improve their ability to address compliance issues. However, weaknesses still exist. For example, staff we spoke with in Washington, D.C., and at overseas posts told us that communication is sometimes inefficient. Moreover, Commerce staff do not always have access to complete information from overseas posts regarding compliance issues they are working on in those countries.

Agency resources for handling compliance issues face growing demands. Competition with other activities, such as trade negotiations, and staffing and training limitations, all affect agencies' ability to effectively monitor and enforce trade agreements. For example, officials responsible for monitoring and enforcing trade agreements in all eight overseas posts we visited said that additional training would help them monitor and enforce trade agreements more effectively. Despite these constraints and agencies' shared responsibility for monitoring and enforcing trade agreements, agencies do not systematically coordinate their assessment or planning for future resource needs.



Source: GAO analysis of USTR and WTO data.