



Highlights of [GAO-06-97](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

To reduce greenhouse gas emissions linked to climate change, two voluntary programs encourage participants to set emissions reduction goals. The Climate Leaders Program, managed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), focuses on firms. The Climate VISION (Voluntary Innovative Sector Initiatives: Opportunities Now) Program, managed by the Department of Energy (DOE) along with other agencies, focuses on trade groups.

GAO examined (1) participants' progress in completing program steps, the agencies' procedures for tracking progress, and their policies for dealing with participants that are not progressing as expected; (2) the types of emissions reduction goals established by participants; and (3) the agencies' estimates of the share of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions that their programs account for and their estimates of the programs' impacts on U.S. emissions.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOE develop a system for tracking groups' progress in completing program steps. Also, GAO recommends that both agencies develop written policies on what to do about participants not progressing as quickly as expected. EPA did not comment on the recommendation, and DOE agreed with the recommendation on a tracking system and said it will consider the recommendation on establishing a written policy.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-97.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact John Stephenson at (202) 512-3841 or stephensonj@gao.gov.

CLIMATE CHANGE

EPA and DOE Should Do More to Encourage Progress Under Two Voluntary Programs

What GAO Found

EPA expects Climate Leaders firms to complete several program steps within general time frames, but firms' progress on completing those steps is mixed. For example, EPA asks firms to set an emissions reduction goal, generally within 2 years of joining. As of November 2005, 38 of the program's 74 participating firms had set a goal. Of the 36 firms that had not set a goal, 13 joined in 2002 and thus took longer than expected to set a goal. EPA is developing a system for tracking firms' progress in completing these steps, but it has no written policy on what to do about firms that are not progressing as expected. Trade groups generally established an emissions reduction goal before joining Climate VISION, and DOE generally expects them to develop a plan for measuring and reporting emissions within about 1 year of joining. As of November 2005, 11 of the 15 participating groups had such a plan, but 2 of the groups without a plan joined in 2003, the program's first year. DOE has no means of tracking trade groups' progress in completing the steps in their plans and no written policy on what to do about groups that are not progressing as expected. A tracking system would enable the agency to ascertain whether participants are meeting program expectations in a timely manner, thereby helping the program to achieve its goals. By establishing a written policy on the consequences of not progressing as expected, both agencies could better ensure that participants are actively engaged in the programs, thus helping to achieve the programs' goals.

The types of emissions reduction goals established by Climate Leaders firms and Climate VISION groups vary in how reductions are measured and the time periods covered, among other things. For example, one Climate Leaders firm's goal is to reduce its domestic emissions by 5 percent over 10 years; another's is to reduce its worldwide emissions per dollar of revenue by 35 percent over 7 years. Similarly, one Climate VISION group's goal is to reduce emissions of one greenhouse gas by 10 percent, while another's is to reduce its emissions per unit of output by 12 percent. GAO noted that some Climate VISION groups said meeting their goals may be linked to reciprocal federal actions, such as tax incentives or regulatory relief.

EPA officials estimated that the first 50 firms to join Climate Leaders account for at least 8 percent of U.S. greenhouse emissions. DOE estimated that Climate VISION participants account for at least 40 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions. EPA and DOE are working through an interagency process to quantify the emissions reductions attributable to their programs; the process is expected to be completed in 2006. However, determining the reductions attributable to each program will be challenging because of the overlap between these programs and other voluntary programs, as well as other factors.