



National water-quality assessment : Geological Survey faces formidable data management challenges : report to the Chairman, Environment, Energy, and ... Operations, House of Representatives

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Pursuant to a congressional request, GAO reviewed the U.S. Geological Survey's (USGS) National Water-Quality Assessment Program's (NAWQA) efforts to obtain and use water-quality data.

GAO found that: (1) the NAWQA program has sought ways to cooperate and share related data with other federal, state, and local agencies to offset the expense of collecting, analyzing, and storing water-quality data and provide a national assessment of water resources; (2) NAWQA has encountered many obstacles in obtaining existing external data including the data's inability to meet NAWQA needs as a secondary user, the lack of data uniformity and inconsistent data management practices between NAWQA and other data collection organizations, secondary users' uncertainty of the quality of data it did not collect, and difficulties in determining how to use data collected by other organizations that have different sampling and analysis practices; (3) some local NAWQA sites have had success in overcoming obstacles by expanding their sampling and analysis activities to meet NAWQA needs, examining quality assurance procedures, and developing compatible software to permit electronic data transfer; and (4) interagency and intergovernmental efforts to overcome data obstacles include establishing programs that examine data quality and facilitate interagency coordination, developing national water-quality data standards and procedures, and implementing a national strategy to integrate monitoring efforts, efficiently use resources, effectively distribute information, and provide comparable data.

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