

# Harmful Algal Blooms: Congressional Request for U.S. Governmental Accountability Office Recommendations



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Several Congressmen from the United States House of Representatives Majority sent an April 29th request to the Comptroller General of the United States, U.S. Government Accountability Office (“GAO”) addressing harmful algal blooms (“HAB”).

The April 29th request asked that GAO address a number of questions related to HAB.

HABs are overgrowths of algae in water. Such blooms can produce toxins that can cause illness in people and animals. They can occur in warm, fresh, marine or branch water if abundant nutrients are present.

Besides producing dangerous toxins, HABs can also:

- Create dead zones in the water
- Increase treatment costs for drinking water and industry facilities that need clean water

The United States Environmental Protection Agency and a number of states have focused significant efforts on studying and addressing HABs. For example, the Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment – Division of Environmental Quality published a document in December 2019 titled:

Harmful Algae Bloom Management Plan

The plan was developed by the Arkansas Harmful Algae Bloom Workgroup.

The April 29th Congressional letter references:

- Impacts of HABs
- Activities of federal agencies, states, international organizations, etc. researching HABs
- Report by the Interagency Working Group

The Congressional request asks GAO to:

... conduct HAB and hypoxia-related activities to address these growing threats to our nation’s public health, environment and economy. . .

They ask that the effectiveness and efficiency of the taxpayer dollars being used be examined, including the following questions:

1. To what extent are federal agencies addressing the challenges identified in the IWG's 2018 report? In particular, given the likelihood that HABs and hypoxia will increase in prevalence,

frequency, and severity in the coming years, how are federal agencies planning to forecast, monitor, and respond to their environmental, health, and economic effects?

2. To what extent are federal agencies coordinating their efforts and leveraging resources effectively to minimize the short- and long-term detrimental effects of HABs and hypoxia, including on human and environmental health?
3. How are federal agencies helping state and local governments prepare for, respond to, and become more resilient to HABs and hypoxia?
4. To what extent has the IWG developed strategic goals, objectives, and performance measures and monitored progress related to federal HAB and hypoxia-related activities?
5. What, if any, federal agencies or local and state governments are employing adaptation methods that utilize natural infrastructure to minimize the spread of HAB and hypoxia events, and have they been successful?
6. To what extent are federal agencies addressing the impacts on property values from repeat HAB and hypoxia events?
7. To what extent are agencies studying and addressing the role of climate variability and extreme weather events in exacerbating HABs and hypoxia?
8. Have agency budgets for HABs and hypoxia since the first HABHRCA was passed in 1998 adequately addressed gaps in the research to understand the underlying causes of HABs and hypoxia?

A copy of the letter can be downloaded [here](#).