

Water and Wastewater Workforce: January 2018 U.S. Government Accountability Office Report Addressing Recruiting



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The United States Government Accountability Office (“GAO”) issued a January 2018 report titled:

Water and Wastewater Workforce – Recruiting Approaches Help Industry Hire Operators, but Additional EPA Guidance Could Help Identify Future Needs (“Report”)

See GAO-18-102.

GAO states that the purpose of the Report was to review workforce needs within the drinking water and wastewater industry.

The Report describes:

1. What is known about workforce needs at water utilities compared with workforce needs nationwide and effects of potential unmet workforce needs on the utilities’ compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act
2. Approaches used by selected utilities to manage their workforce needs and challenges they have faced in managing those needs
3. Ways in which federal programs can assist water utilities with workforce needs

GAO notes that the safety of United States water utilities is dependent on access to a qualified workforce. This is stated to be particularly important in regards to certified water operators. Industry reports are stated to cite high rates of retirement eligibility, raising concerns about the industry’s ability to fill job openings.

The GAO Report reviews:

- Workforce projections
- Relevant laws and regulations
- Agency documents
- Industry studies
- Interviews of federal, local, and industry officials

Also conducted were semi-structured interviews with a nongeneralizable sample of 11 water utilities which were selected by size, location, and indication of workforce needs.

The Report recommends that EPA adds strategic workforce planning questions to its inspection guidance documents. Examples of such questions would include the positions and skills needed in the future.

[A link to the Report can be found here.](#)