The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report on July 28, 2022, entitled Persistent Chemicals: Technologies for PFAS Assessment, Detection, and Treatment. GAO was asked to conduct a technology assessment on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) assessment, detection, and treatment. The report examines the technologies for more efficient assessments of the adverse health
effects of PFAS and alternative substances; the benefits and challenges of current and emerging technologies for PFAS detection and treatment; and policy options that could help enhance benefits and mitigate challenges associated with these technologies. GAO assessed relevant technologies; surveyed PFAS subject matter experts; interviewed stakeholder groups, including government, non-governmental organizations (NGO), industry, and academia; and reviewed key reports. GAO identified three challenges associated with PFAS assessment, detection, and treatment technologies:

- PFAS chemical structures are diverse and difficult to analyze for health risks, and machine learning requires extensive training data that may not be available;
- Researchers lack analytical standards for many PFAS, limiting the development of effective detection methods; and
- The effectiveness and availability of disposal and destruction options for PFAS are uncertain because of a lack of data, monitoring, and guidance.

GAO developed the following three policy options that could help mitigate these challenges:

- Promote research: Policymakers could support development of technologies and methods to more efficiently research PFAS health risks. This policy option could help address the challenge of limited information on the large number and diversity of PFAS, as well as a lack of standardized data sets for machine learning;
- Expand method development: Policymakers could collaborate to improve access to standard reference samples of PFAS and increase the pace of method and reference sample development for PFAS detection. This policy option could help address the challenges of a lack of validated methods in media other than water, lack of analytical standards, and cost, which all affect researchers’ ability to develop new detection technologies; and
- Support full-scale treatment: Policymakers could encourage the development and evaluation of full-scale technologies and methods to dispose of or destroy PFAS. This policy option could help address the challenges of cost and efficiency of disposal and destruction technologies and a lack of guidance from regulators.

GAO notes that these policy options involve possible actions by policymakers, which may include Congress, federal agencies, state and local governments, academia, and industry.

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