



Highlights of [GAO-10-249](#), a report to the Honorable Edward J. Markey, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates industries that affect the lives of virtually all Americans. FCC-regulated industries provide Americans with daily access to communications services, including wireline and wireless telephone, radio, and television. To ensure FCC is carrying out its mission, the commission requires a significant amount of information, such as ownership and operating information from radio and television stations. In prior reports, GAO has found weaknesses with FCC's information collection, management, and reporting processes. While FCC has taken action, the commission has not implemented all the recommendations associated with information collection, management, and reporting.

As requested, this report provides information on (1) the information FCC collects; (2) how FCC collects and manages information; (3) the strengths and weaknesses, if any, in FCC's information collection and management practices; and (4) the status of FCC's internal review of its information collection and management practices. To complete this work, GAO gathered information on FCC's information collection efforts, reviewed information collection and management practices for 30 collection instruments, interviewed agency officials and industry stakeholders, and reviewed relevant laws and guidance. FCC provided comments which discuss its efforts to improve data management.

View [GAO-10-249](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact David Wise at (202) 512-2834 or wised@gao.gov.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Information Collection and Management at the Federal Communications Commission

What GAO Found

FCC gathers a wide variety of information through information collection instruments. FCC gathers information through 413 collection instruments approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Through these OMB-approved collection instruments, FCC gathers information pertaining to (1) required company filings, such as the ownership of television stations; (2) applications for FCC licenses; (3) consumer complaints; (4) company financial and accounting performance; and (5) a variety of other issues, such as an annual survey of cable operators. FCC estimates that it receives nearly 385 million responses with an estimated 57 million burden hours associated with the 413 collection instruments.

FCC's bureaus and offices collect and manage most commission information following commissionwide programs, policies, and procedures. FCC articulates its commissionwide programs, policies, and procedures in several directives, including its records management program. These directives help ensure FCC's compliance with governmentwide laws and regulations. Since FCC's bureaus and offices are the primary users of information, implementing decisions generally occur at that level. According to GAO's review of 30 information collections, FCC's bureaus and offices collect and manage information in a variety of ways. For example, FCC collects and manages 14 of the 30 information collections electronically, while it collects and manages some information in paper format. FCC disseminates information from 11 of the 30 information collections on its Web site, while it disseminates some information upon request, but in a redacted format.

According to GAO's review of 30 information collections, FCC's bureaus and offices appear to follow commission- and governmentwide guidance, such as quality control procedures and safeguards for sensitive information. However, prior GAO reports and some stakeholders identified certain weaknesses with FCC's information collection and management practices. These weaknesses concern FCC's information collection processes and the accuracy of the estimated burden hours associated with FCC's information collections. For example, GAO recently reported that FCC rarely includes the text of a proposed rule in its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, and stakeholders similarly noted that FCC does not initially specify the information that it wants to gather in the notice; the lack of specificity makes it harder for stakeholders and the public to provide meaningful input on the proposed information collection instrument.

Recognizing the need to improve the commission's information practices, in July 2009, FCC's Chairman initiated a review of the commission's systems and processes. The Chairman sought to address whether (1) new information should be collected, (2) existing information reporting requirements could be streamlined or eliminated, and (3) existing technology and management processes could be modernized in order to make the commission's use of information more efficient and effective. FCC staff have taken several steps to implement the review and the effort continues.