Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 28, 2026

The Honorable Orice W. Brown
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Acting Comptroller General Brown:

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a comprehensive review of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) efforts to effectively assess the presence and risks associated with human exposure to micro- and nanoplastics. A clear account of the EPA's completed and ongoing work, current capabilities, and plans for future action is crucial for Congress to build upon and address gaps in the existing efforts to tackle this rapidly evolving issue.

Microplastics have become a growing public health and environmental concern over the past decade[1]. Researchers have detected their presence in drinking water, food, air, and human tissues, including the lungs, brain, placenta, and reproductive organs[2]. Emerging research has raised concerns about their possible cardiovascular, respiratory, reproductive, developmental, and other health effects[3]. However, knowledge about the risks associated with microplastics remains incomplete. Their widespread presence, environmental persistence, and continued release from consumer products, tires, wastewater, and other sources underscore the need for reliable methods to measure exposure and evaluate potential harm.

In recognition of these growing health concerns, the EPA has begun to formulate plans to evaluate and address microplastic pollution, with work spanning across both the Biden and Trump Administrations. The EPA's October 2022 *Safe and Sustainable Water Resources (SSWR) Strategic Research Action Plan for Fiscal Years 2023-2026* outlines a plan to develop or adapt methods for assessing the effects of microplastics on human health and aquatic life in Output SSWR 3.4.

The EPA's November 2024 *National Strategy to Prevent Plastic Pollution* identified additional actions related to microplastics[4]. These included developing government-wide definitions and standardized methods for

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[1] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Microplastics Research," last updated March 19, 2026, https://www.epa.gov/water-research/microplastics-research

[2] Allen + Clarke Consulting, *Microplastics and Health Report*, prepared for the Australian Centre for Disease Control (January 2026), 68–78, 94–103, https://www.cdc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-04/microplastics-and-health-report.pdf; Nicholas Chartres et al., "Effects of Microplastic Exposure on Human Digestive, Reproductive, and Respiratory Health: A Rapid Systematic Review," *Environmental Science & Technology* 58, no. 52 (2024): 22843–64, https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.est.3c09524; Raffaele Marfella et al., "Microplastics and Nanoplastics in Atheromas and Cardiovascular Events," *New England Journal of Medicine* 390, no. 10 (2024): 900–910, https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMoa2309822

[3] Ibid.

[4] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *National Strategy to Prevent Plastic Pollution: Part Three of a Series on Building a Circular Economy for All*, EPA 530-R-24-006 (November 2024), https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-11/final_national_strategy_to_prevent_plastic_pollution.pdf

collecting, extracting, quantifying, and characterizing microplastics; examining the use of federal water programs to address plastic pollution; and supporting the development of technologies to detect, capture, and remove microplastics from water.

The Safe Drinking Water Act is the cornerstone federal framework for regulating drinking water-based contaminants. In December 2025, seven governors sent a petition to the EPA, nominating microplastics as a contaminant to be monitored in the Sixth Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR 6). By law, this requires the EPA to either monitor microplastics in the UCMR or justify why each of their other 30 other contaminants presents a "higher public health concern".[5] In April 2026, the EPA included microplastics in the draft of its sixth drinking water Contaminant Candidate List (CCL), highlighting it as a priority for research and regulation[6]. However, the EPA's proposed Sixth Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR 6), published in July 2026, did not include microplastics among the contaminants that public water systems would be required to monitor[7]. Two years ago, in its request for methods for the UCMR, EPA stated that it was "in the early stages of developing a microplastics method."[8] Despite this past announcement, the EPA stated that no validated analytical method was available and that developing one before the statutory deadline was infeasible, and no mention was made of the previous work or the agency's progress to date. Notably, the EPA has not scientifically justified, or even stated, that microplastics are less of a public health threat than any of the 30 other contaminants they included on the draft UCMR.

Across the country, however, Americans are acutely aware of the danger that microplastics pose. A 2025 polling report found that 79% of American adults agree that microplastics present a "human health crisis that requires immediate action."[9] Another 2026 poll found that 84% of Americans reported being "concerned" about the microplastics. [10] Recently, Representatives Krishnamoorthi and Bynum and Senators Merkley and Booker led over 50 of their colleagues in a letter urging the EPA to add microplastics to UCMR 6 and establish a robust, nationwide drinking-water monitoring program, underscoring Congress's strong interest in addressing this issue.[11] Even inside the administration, HHS Secretary Kennedy highlighted the harm in his joint press conference on the CCL. When the topic came up, Kennedy asked, strangely "Why do we need to know anything more?... Shouldn't we be acting right now?"[12]

Even as the EPA's FY2023-FY2026 research plan approaches its conclusion, Congress lacks a clear assessment of what the EPA has accomplished in its work on microplastics and what work remains necessary to support reliable monitoring, risk assessment and potential regulatory action. We therefore request that the GAO examine the following questions:

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[5] https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/senate-bill/1316/text, Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996

[6] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Draft Contaminant Candidate List 6—CCL 6," last updated April 7, 2026, https://www.epa.gov/ccl/draft-contaminant-candidate-list-6-ccl-6

[7] U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Revisions To Establish the Sixth Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule (UCMR 6) for Public Water Systems," proposed rule, *Federal Register* 91 (July 1, 2026): 39952, https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2026-13263.

[8] EPA. *Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule; Methods Request and Webinar*. 89 Fed. Reg. 8584. (Feb. 8, 2024).

[9] https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6537fd1a80e60f606d49aaff/t/687ed00306f41f153a704a94/1753141333338/Microplastics+Polling+Report.pdf

[10] https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/OC-Microplastics-Polling-Summary-2026_FINAL.pdf

[11] Raja Krishnamoorthi et al., letter to EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin, June 30, 2026, https://krishnamoorthi.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/krishnamoorthi-evo.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/member-letter-on-microplastics-in-water.pdf

[12] Administrator Zeldin and Secretary Kennedy to Announce Major MAHA Win, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-puiTHnHfDU

1. What microplastic- and nanoplastic-related activities has the EPA undertaken since FY2023, including research, analytical method development, monitoring, risk assessment, pollution prevention, development and evaluation of capture and removal technologies, grant programs, and regulatory and other policy activities? The review should include the responsible EPA offices, funding sources, completed and anticipated deliverables, and relevant timelines.
2. To what extent has the EPA implemented the microplastics-related goals, outputs, and actions identified in its FY2023-FY2026 Safe and Sustainable Water Resources Strategic Research Action Plan and its 2024 National Strategy to Prevent Plastic Pollution? Which activities have been completed, remain underway, or been delayed or discontinued? Specifically:
    a. What progress has the EPA made toward developing government-wide definitions and validated, fit-for-purpose methods for collecting, extracting, identifying, quantifying, and characterizing microplastics and nanoplastics?
    b. What research has EPA conducted or supported on the prevalence, sources, pathways, fate, and concentrations of microplastics and nanoplastics, and what are the resulting findings?
    c. What research has the EPA conducted on the toxicity of micro- and nanoplastics in human and aquatic life, and what are the resulting findings?
    d. What methods, models, and tools has the EPA developed or investigated to evaluate the effects of microplastics and nanoplastics on human health and aquatic resources, and what are the resulting findings?
    e. What progress has EPA made in developing, testing, demonstrating, deploying, or funding management practices and technologies to prevent, capture, or remove microplastics and nanoplastics from the environment?
        i. What interventions, including funding, has the EPA undertaken to support research and development of technologies addressing pathways through which micro- and nanoplastics are released into the environment?
        ii. What evaluation has the EPA conducted on the use of relevant water programs to address plastic pollution in waterways and the ocean?
    f. What actions has EPA taken to implement the strategy's identified policy and program opportunities, including evaluating the use of Clean Water Act authorities and providing technical assistance to incorporate plastic-pollution prevention, capture, and removal measures into relevant management plans?
3. What statutory, financial, workforce, technological, or infrastructure constraints affect the EPA's ability to advance its work of researching and regulating microplastics?

Addressing microplastic pollution is critical for protecting the health of Americans and safeguarding our waterways and ecosystems. Our constituents deserve to know what microplastic exposure means for their families' health, and the requested information above will be critical in informing Congress's work in tackling this challenge. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Raja Krishnamoorthi
Member of Congress

Janelle S. Bynum
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Dan Goldman
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Emanuel Cleaver, II
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Mike Quigley
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Melanie Stansbury
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