

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 15, 2007

The Honorable David M. Walker
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

In 2001, the federal government formally established the National Nanotechnology Initiative (NNI), a multi-agency federal research and development effort, to accelerate the discovery, development and deployment of nanoscale science and technology. Total research and development funding for the NNI has grown to \$1.3 billion in Fiscal Year 2006. Twenty-two federal agencies participate in the NNI, including four with regulatory responsibilities to protect human health and the environment—the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

One key expectation for the NNI was to ensure that adequate attention and research funding was made available to gain a better understanding of the potential environmental, health, and safety (EHS) risks associated with nanomaterials. However, we are extremely concerned that this has not happened and that there is a lack of transparency with regard to how much federal attention and funding this important aspect of the initiative is receiving. As a result, it is difficult to determine with any reliability the extent to which federal agencies have undertaken research to increase our understanding of potential EHS risks of nanomaterials and how they are prioritizing and managing this research.

Therefore, we are requesting that GAO: (1) review the extent to which NNI-related resources have been devoted to study the EHS risks of nanomaterials; (2) identify the key areas of research for which this EHS funding has been used; (3) determine what processes the Nanotechnology Environmental and Health Implications Working Group uses to prioritize and coordinate these various EHS research efforts; and (4) review and identify any EHS related research and regulatory activities, independent of the NNI, that the four regulatory agencies EPA, FDA, CPSC and OSHA have undertaken, the amount of funding made available for these efforts, and the extent to which information about these efforts has been communicated to the Working Group to ensure that they are considered in the overall research planning processes for the NNI.

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This is a very important issue and we hope that GAO will give this review a high priority. Please contact Chan Lieu on the Commerce Committee's staff at (202) 224-0415, who will be the primary point of contact for this request.

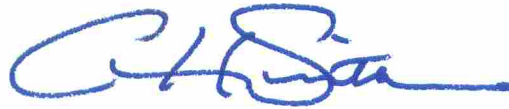
Sincerely,



DANIEL K. INOUE
Chairman
Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation



MARK L. PRYOR
Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation



GORDON H. SMITH
Senate Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation



RON WYDEN
Congressional Nanotechnology Caucus



RICHARD BURR
Congressional Nanotechnology Caucus