

USGS Workforce Reductions and FACSQI Elimination

Dear Secretary Burgum:

We write to express deep concern over the abrupt elimination of the Federal Advisory Committee for Science Quality and Integrity (FACSQI) and broader workforce reductions at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). These decisions undermine the agency's ability to uphold scientific integrity, provide reliable data, and fulfill its critical mission to protect public safety, natural resources, and environmental health.

The Advisory Committee for Science Quality and Integrity was established to provide independent guidance to the USGS Director on scientific integrity, research oversight, and data reliability. It was poised to play a vital role in:

1. Scientific Integrity – Enhancing policies to uphold ethical research practices, safeguard against misconduct and prevent political interference.
2. Laboratory Oversight – Strengthening quality control measures to maintain rigorous scientific standards.
3. STEM & Workforce Development – Cultivating the next generation of scientists through education and mentorship.
4. Tribal Partnerships & Research Advancement – Expanding collaboration with Indigenous communities and other key research partners.

The committee was created, in part, to address systemic failures identified by the Inspector General in a 2024 report², including serious lapses in laboratory oversight and scientific integrity. A notable example of this occurred at the National Water Quality Laboratory in Colorado, where quality control values were falsified. This incident was driven by pressures on analysts, compounded by heavy workloads and a lack of adequate oversight and support. FACSQI was designed to provide the necessary external oversight to prevent such failures and protect our drinking water testing—yet its elimination removes these essential safeguards, increasing risks to public health and safety.

This decision is part of a broader, troubling pattern at the Department of the Interior, which has also dismantled advisory panels on climate adaptation, conservation, and even the review of racially insensitive place names. Interior officials claim these cuts “streamline operations” and “reduce redundancies,” but in reality, they weaken the government's scientific capacity, erode public trust, and leave communities more vulnerable to environmental and natural hazards. The damage extends beyond FACSQI's elimination. The loss of 240 USGS positions further weakens the agency's ability to effectively:

5. Provide real-time earthquake and hazard monitoring.
6. Conduct essential groundwater and water quality assessments.
7. Maintain geologic mapping crucial for disaster preparedness.

8. Ensure sustainable management of mineral and energy resources critical to national security.
9. Support public lands conservation and outdoor recreation.
10. Build the strong domestic STEM workforce necessary for American innovation and competitiveness.

Given these concerns, we request responses to the following questions by April 8th, 2025:

1. How will USGS ensure scientific integrity without the advisory committee?
2. What steps is USGS taking to address challenges identified in the 2024 Inspector General report?
3. How will USGS maintain its ability to monitor natural hazards, water resources, and environmental changes given current staffing reductions?
4. What alternative mechanisms will be implemented to ensure independent scientific review and accountability?
5. How will USGS continue to support STEM workforce development and youth engagement?
6. How will USGS, as the primary source of information on domestic critical minerals supply chains, maintain up-to-date information on American geological resources?
7. What steps is USGS taking to ensure continued public access to its data, widely used for safety, outdoor recreation, resource management, and scientific advancements?
8. What steps is USGS taking to ensure continued protection of sensitive data, including proprietary information from industry surveys and sovereign tribal data on special and sacred sites?

USGS data and research have served as a cornerstone of national preparedness and environmental stewardship. The elimination of FACSQI and the loss of over 240 positions puts that legacy at serious risk. We expect a full explanation for these decisions and a clear plan for preserving the integrity, independence and capacity of USGS science moving forward. The American public, policymakers, and the scientific community deserve nothing less.