Press Release

The Hidden Cost of Federal Paperwork

PAULINA ENCK | OCTOBER 27, 2021

The lack of transparency in how the federal government discloses its estimated paperwork costs highlights how stagnant and inefficient the federal paperwork management apparatus has become. In new research, Senior Regulatory Policy Analyst Dan Goldbeck analyzes the reported costs of the federal government paperwork burden, and notes that its public-facing numbers fail to include the government's own calculations of hourly labor costs. When these labor costs are included, the actual costs of federal paperwork burdens are at least twice as high as the public-facing estimates.

Key points:

- According to the agency in charge of reviewing regulatory requirements, the current federal paperwork tally includes roughly 9,400 requirements that bring nearly 10 billion hours of paperwork each year with approximately $139 billion in estimated costs.
- The public-facing cost figure is woefully incomplete, however; analysis of estimates included in supporting documentation suggest that when the government's own calculations of labor costs are included, the actual cost of the federal paperwork burden is at least $276.6 billion—about twice as high as the public-facing figure—and perhaps upward of $422 billion.
- Ascertaining a more transparent and complete accounting on this matter is both good policy in its own regard, and key to finding ways to cut unnecessary and duplicative items.

Read this morning's *Washington Examiner* article on the piece here.

Read the analysis