**Major scandals at the Department of Energy**

The Department of Energy (DOE) has faced a number of major scandals and controversies over the years, often involving financial mismanagement, environmental cleanup failures, cybersecurity breaches, and ethics violations

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Recent and ongoing scandals (2020–2025)

* DOE grant program mismanagement (2025): An August 2025 report by the Inspector General (IG) found that the Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED) lacked sufficient internal controls while implementing a nearly $6 billion grant program. Failures included not documenting internal policies, not conducting a program-wide risk assessment, and lacking a plan to mitigate conflicts of interest.
* Hanford cleanup mismanagement (2024–2025): The Hanford Site, a former nuclear production facility, has been the site of a long-standing and costly cleanup effort.
	+ In September 2025, a top Trump administration official overseeing the project was fired amid speculation that new DOE leadership intended to cancel the estimated $30 billion cleanup project.
	+ In 2024, the Washington State Department of Ecology identified another leaking tank (T-101) containing toxic radioactive nuclear waste, bringing the total number of known active leakers to three. The waste from these tanks can contaminate the soil and groundwater.
* Secretary Granholm's EV road trip (2025): A January 2025 IG report found that DOE Secretary Jennifer Granholm’s 2023 EV road trip included multiple abuses of taxpayer funds. The report concluded that 86% of lodging expenses exceeded government per diem rates, and travel vouchers contained inaccuracies and policy violations.
* Grant award targeting claims (2025): In April 2025, congressional leaders from the House Energy Committee requested an IG investigation into the DOE's review of all financial assistance and contracts. The request was based on the belief that recent award and contract cancellations were politically motivated and unfairly targeted projects in Democratic-leaning districts.
* Indirect costs cap lawsuit (2025): Nineteen states and the District of Columbia sued the DOE in August 2025 over a new policy that capped the use of grant funding for "indirect costs" at 10%. The states argue the policy violates federal law and will force them to abandon critical projects.
* DOE climate working group violations (2025): Following a lawsuit from environmental groups, the DOE dissolved a climate research group in September 2025. The lawsuit alleged the group had violated the Federal Advisory Committee Act by not issuing public meeting notices and failing to balance points of view.
* Sexual misconduct and ethical violations (2025): An IG investigation confirmed in January 2025 that a Trump-era official, Joseph Uddo, had engaged in sexual misconduct in 2019 and failed to properly report a relationship with a foreign national. The probe also uncovered irregularities in his expense reports.

Notable past scandals

* Cybersecurity breaches (2020, 2023):
	+ In December 2020, the DOE and other federal agencies were compromised by the SolarWinds hack, which malicious code was hidden in updates to its software.
	+ In June 2023, Russian-linked hackers hit the DOE and other agencies in a global campaign that exploited a vulnerability in the MOVEit file-transfer software.
* Nuclear reactor meltdown cover-up (2007): A U.S. District Court in 2007 held the DOE accountable for failing to clean up radioactive contaminants at the

Santa Susana Field Laboratory

, a nuclear facility near Los Angeles. The DOE had tried to reverse its commitment to a full cleanup after a 1959 partial meltdown, instead proposing to leave 99% of the contamination untouched for potential residential development.

* Grant and contract fraud (2019): A number of cases in early 2019 exposed fraud involving DOE contractors and grant recipients.
	+ A former Virginia Tech professor was found guilty of grant fraud, false statements, and obstruction.
	+ Two contractor company owners were found guilty of conspiracy to defraud the United States in connection with DOE contracts.
* The Solar program loan controversy (2011): The DOE offered a $535 million loan guarantee to the solar energy company Solyndra. The company went bankrupt just two years later, leading to investigations over concerns about taxpayer money being at risk due to poor management and political influence.

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**Major scandals at the Department of Veterans Affairs**

The Department of Veterans Affairs has faced a long history of scandals that have eroded public trust in its ability to care for those who served. One of the most infamous erupted in 2014, when investigations revealed that the Phoenix VA and other facilities kept secret scheduling lists to hide the true extent of patient wait times. Veterans sometimes waited months for care, and some died before receiving treatment. While administrators falsified records to make performance look better, many of them still received generous bonuses. That same year, it came to light that the VA had paid out more than $140 million in performance awards, even to managers whose offices were plagued by dangerous delays and inefficiency.

These failures highlighted a broader issue: an enormous backlog of benefits claims. By the early 2010s, veterans often had to wait years for decisions on disability appeals, leaving many without timely access to resources they were entitled to. The agency’s inability to process cases efficiently was seen as a symptom of entrenched mismanagement.

The VA has also been rocked by scandals beyond its scheduling and benefits systems. In 2006, a massive data breach exposed the personal information of nearly 26.5 million veterans after an employee improperly took sensitive records home, underscoring serious weaknesses in the department’s cybersecurity practices. In the 2000s and 2010s, the Tomah, Wisconsin VA gained a notorious reputation as “Candyland,” where veterans were overprescribed opioids at alarming rates, often leaving them sedated and vulnerable rather than truly treated. Elsewhere, inspections uncovered neglect of elderly veterans in long-term care facilities, including cases in Puerto Rico where patients were left without adequate help for eating, bathing, or even drinking water.

On top of these systemic failures, the department has been repeatedly criticized for wasteful spending and poor oversight. Reports detailed expensive conferences, destroyed documents, and continued payouts of bonuses even when performance was abysmal. Together, these scandals paint a picture of a department where systemic mismanagement, lack of accountability, and cultural failures have repeatedly compromised the mission of caring for veterans.

**Major VA Scandals**

| **Scandal** | **Date(s)** | **What Happened** | **Consequences / Reforms** |
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| **VA Wait-Times / Secret Scheduling Lists (Phoenix & others)** | 2014 | At the Phoenix VA medical center, it was discovered that veterans were waiting months for treatment, some dying while waiting. VA officials maintained secret ("off the books") wait lists to hide delays. Data was manipulated to meet internal performance goals. [Vox+2SAGE Journals+2](https://www.vox.com/2014/9/26/18080592/va-scandal-explained?utm_source=chatgpt.com) | Widespread outrage; several investigations; then-Secretary Eric Shinseki resigned. Reforms aimed at tracking wait times more transparently, improving capacity. Congress passed the *Demanding Accountability for Veterans Act of 2013*. [Wikipedia+2Vox+2](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demanding_Accountability_for_Veterans_Act_of_2013?utm_source=chatgpt.com) |
| **Bonuses Paid Despite Poor Performance** | 2014 (and surrounding years) | Even while scandals such as wait lists and backlogs were public, the VA paid out large sums in performance bonuses to executives/managers. Some bonuses went to people supervising offices with extremely poor processing times or serious quality issues. [togel+3AJMC+3Washington Examiner+3](https://www.ajmc.com/view/embroiled-in-scandals-over-veterans-health-va-still-paid-142m-in-bonuses-in-2014?utm_source=chatgpt.com) | Public criticism; investigations; partial suspensions of bonuses; attempts to tie leadership accountability more closely to performance. [AJMC+2Vox+2](https://www.ajmc.com/view/embroiled-in-scandals-over-veterans-health-va-still-paid-142m-in-bonuses-in-2014?utm_source=chatgpt.com) |
| **Benefits Claims Backlog** | Especially early 2010s | A very large backlog of disability claim appeals. Veterans often waited very long for decisions on benefits they were entitled to. Processing times ballooned. [Vox+2DisabledVeterans.org+2](https://www.vox.com/2014/9/26/18080592/va-scandal-explained?utm_source=chatgpt.com) | VA attempted reforms: more staff, improved tracking, better appeals process. The backlog was addressed over time but has been a recurring issue. [Vox+1](https://www.vox.com/2014/9/26/18080592/va-scandal-explained?utm_source=chatgpt.com) |
| **Data Breach of Veterans’ Personal Information** | 2006 | Sensitive personal information (e.g. Social Security numbers, birth dates) of ~26.5 million veterans was stolen after a VA employee improperly took records home; those records were burglarized. [togel+1](https://www.veterans-for-change.org/news/210-veterans-affairs/9492-91-years-of-corruption-the-va-s-brutal-history-in-military?utm_source=chatgpt.com) | Heightened awareness of VA’s data security; criticisms of how records are handled; increased pressure for privacy protections. [togel+1](https://www.veterans-for-change.org/news/210-veterans-affairs/9492-91-years-of-corruption-the-va-s-brutal-history-in-military?utm_source=chatgpt.com) |
| **“Candyland” Opioid Overprescribing at Tomah, Wisconsin** | 2000s–2010s | At the Tomah VA hospital, clinicians (notably Dr. Dan Houlihan) prescribed large quantities of opioid pain medication. Whistleblowers described veterans being “doped up,” overly sedated, etc. [Washington Examiner+2AJMC+2](https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/1688326/nine-major-veterans-affairs-failures/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) | Critical reporting and investigations; some doctors disciplined; raised awareness about opioid prescribing in VA; some veterans’ harm due to overprescribing. [Washington Examiner+1](https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/1688326/nine-major-veterans-affairs-failures/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) |
| **Neglect of Elderly Veterans / Poor Conditions** | Mid-2010s | In Puerto Rico and elsewhere, facilities were found to have neglected elderly veterans—for example failing to assist with daily living (bathing, toileting), meal assistance, drink, etc. [Washington Examiner](https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/1688326/nine-major-veterans-affairs-failures/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) | Public outcry; calls for oversight; some staff demotions; discussions about better standards for geriatric care and accountability. [Washington Examiner](https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/1688326/nine-major-veterans-affairs-failures/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) |
| **Mismanagement, Wasteful Spending** | Various (2010s especially) | Examples: expensive/travel/conference spending; destruction of critical documents; bonuses when performance was poor; multiple VA offices mismanaging their duties. [AJMC+4Washington Examiner+4togel+4](https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/healthcare/937071/faces-of-scandal-at-the-department-of-veterans-affairs/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) | These led to investigations, internal audits, some personnel actions, and policy changes aimed at strengthening oversight. [Washington Examiner+1](https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/healthcare/937071/faces-of-scandal-at-the-department-of-veterans-affairs/?utm_source=chatgpt.com) |