WASHINGTON - Federal agencies are increasingly using information technology to improve regulatory management, according to a General Accounting Office report out today. But the report suggests more innovation and less duplication would result in a broader, more consistent approach by agencies that would allow them to reap the full advantages of IT.

The Congressional requesters of the study singled out for praise the interactive approaches of several agencies, including the Department of Labor, which has a system of electronic advisors that assist small business owners in understanding their rights and responsibilities under federal employment laws and regulations.

"Regulatory management is an obscure but essential piece of the overall enforcement of our laws and the protection of our citizens," Lieberman said. "By using Internet technology to collect and disseminate information, these agencies are helping to make government more efficient and more responsive to the taxpayers."

The report, requested by Lieberman, Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Fred Thompson, R-Tenn., and Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., is based on surveys of five agencies that are primarily responsible for regulating public health and safety, and the environment. They are the Departments of Labor, Agriculture, Transportation, Health and Human Services and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Each agency used some form of IT to improve its regulatory management and to meet legislative and executive branch requirements, according to the report. Most noteworthy were the agencies that used interactive IT, and in doing so, appeared to change the relationship between the agencies and the public.

For example, the Department of Labor's Employment Laws Assistance for Workers and Small Businesses (ELAWS) consists of a set of online advisors that provide information to small business owner in preparation for their interaction with DOL employment law experts

Innovative approaches like ELAWS "reduce the burdens on regulated entities and help them understand their responsibilities," Lieberman said. "IT-based approaches to regulatory management also cuts costs and makes government more transparent."