



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We sought to determine:

- What barriers exist that prevent the National Environmental Information Exchange Network (Network) from achieving maximum usage, and steps the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can take to overcome them.
- Whether EPA has developed Network performance measures that align with its Strategic Plan.
- How EPA could improve key system development processes for analyzing costs and ensuring Network use for new systems and upgrades.
- How EPA could assist the Network governance bodies in accomplishing their missions.

Background

The Exchange Network is EPA's approach (and expected preferred method) for the exchange of environmental data among Network partners. As of January 2007, 48 States and 2 tribes used the Network. EPA has invested more than \$162 million on the Network.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Liaison at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2007/20070820-2007-P-00030.pdf

Improved Management Practices Needed to Increase Use of Exchange Network

What We Found

Although EPA established a partnership with the Exchange Network's governance bodies to assist them with accomplishing Network initiatives, more improvements are needed to ensure Network partners fully utilize the Network. These partners include EPA, States, tribes, territories, and other parties with whom EPA and States exchange information. EPA should improve its methods for selecting and prioritizing which data flows to implement. EPA also needs to take further steps to complete measurements of Network initiatives to ensure investments are delivering expected results. In addition, EPA needs to improve its internal system development practices to ensure EPA offices perform cost benefit analyses for new or upgraded environmental systems. Further, EPA should strengthen its policies to define when offices should utilize the Network for receiving environmental information.

The Exchange Network Business Plan stresses the importance of having an effective collaborative partnership between EPA, the Network governance bodies, and the Network partners. Since EPA intends for the Exchange Network to become the preferred method for exchanging environmental data and foresees expanding the Network, EPA should take steps to improve Network use. Without taking action, EPA would not know when or whether its partners would adopt the Network as the preferred method to share data with EPA. As such, EPA investments in the Network would not yield the desired outcomes.

What We Recommend

We made various recommendations, including that the EPA Office of Environmental Information:

- Execute the Exchange Network Marketing and Communications plan and evaluate data flows for Network implementation,
- Develop a new plan for completing the Exchange Network performance measures project,
- Develop policies and procedures to guide program offices to use the Network and conduct Exchange Network Cost Benefit Analysis, and
- Include the Exchange Network in the Enterprise Architecture.

In general, the Agency agreed with the report's findings and recommendations. We have summarized the Agency's comments in the following report chapters and included the Agency's complete response in Appendix C.