



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We evaluated the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Emergency Response Business Plan (the Plan) to determine: (1) how the Agency estimated resource needs for national emergencies; (2) how the resource estimates considered the use of State and local government agency resources in national emergencies; and (3) how EPA used existing data on chlorine volumes to guide plans for responding to a chemical attack.

Background

EPA developed the Plan in 2006 as the framework for emergency response to national-level incidents while maintaining an effective day-to-day emergency response and removal program. The Plan identifies EPA's resource needs to respond to three distinct national emergency situations (scenarios). These scenarios involve various combinations of radiological, biological, and chemical attacks.

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/2008/20080109-08-P-0055.pdf

EPA Should Continue to Improve Its National Emergency Response Planning

What We Found

We found that EPA's Emergency Response Business Plan did not disclose the basis for EPA's resource estimates. Additionally, EPA management stated they did not consider State and local resources in their resource estimates because they believed they would be working with the affected State and local governments in a unified command structure. EPA considered past experience in estimating the activities they would be asked to perform. Also, EPA did not use existing data on chlorine storage volumes because it was attempting to develop a national scenario applicable to any chemical.

The Plan does not satisfy EPA's need for a framework to respond to incidents of national significance. While EPA has a proven track record of responding effectively to serious environmental situations, those situations are limited in scope and severity when compared to suggested incidents of national significance. EPA's initial effort is too limited and unstructured to prepare the Agency for an effective response. Assumptions are undocumented, resource requirements unsupported, and internal and external coordination of response planning minimal. As a result, the Plan may focus EPA's preparation for emergency response on the wrong resource allocations, leaving the Agency unprepared. EPA intends to address some of these issues as the Plan is revised; the plan is evolving as EPA continues to make progress and improvements.

What We Recommend

We recommend that EPA revise the Plan to incorporate the methodology and assumptions used to develop all personnel and resource estimates, the rationale for the selection of the incidents of national significance, lessons learned from past incidents, logistics of resource deployment, and risk communications. EPA should update key milestones and expand coordination with other EPA offices and relevant Federal agencies in revising the Plan. EPA concurred with our recommendations.