



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

The Office of Management and Budget requested us to evaluate the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) management of the backlog of Superfund sites. Our objective was to determine why some hazardous waste sites in the Superfund program that existed prior to October 1986 have not yet had remedial construction completed. We also reviewed the impacts resulting from sites not yet achieving construction completion.

Background

As of February 2007, there were 144 non-federal sites that had been on the National Priorities List (NPL) for over 20 years but had still not reached construction completion. We focused our review on sites in New Jersey because that State has 38 of the 144 sites, or 26 percent, which is more than any other State.

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/2008/20080602-08-P-0169.pdf

Improved Controls Would Reduce Superfund Backlogs

What We Found

Neither EPA nor the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) took actions needed to ensure progress at seven New Jersey-led Superfund site clean-ups. These sites were listed on the NPL over 20 years ago but still have not had a final clean-up remedy constructed (construction completion). Delays occurred primarily because EPA Region 2 and New Jersey did not use available authorities to prevent delays and implement internal controls. Region 2 and NJDEP did not implement agreements on clean-up milestones, Agency responsibilities, and enforcement actions. As a result, Region 2 did not ensure proper oversight of these Superfund clean-ups. Over the past year, Region 2 and NJDEP have worked together to revise site clean-up schedules and complete clean-ups. Continued clean-up delays will result in increased costs, prevent appropriate land reuse and redevelopment, and perpetuate concern about the risks associated with living near these sites.

For the seven sites reviewed, various interim clean-up actions had been taken to address the impact of site contaminants on human health. However, the site progress profiles on EPA's public Website did not include these interim actions as part of the status of clean-up progress. As a result, progress being made on sites may not be readily communicated to the public.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the Region 2 Administrator direct staff to coordinate with NJDEP officials the clean-up of specified sites more than 20 years old. Region 2 should assume lead status from New Jersey for those sites where both agencies agree it would be beneficial and develop Letters of Agreement for those sites. We also recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Solid Waste and Emergency Response, where appropriate, improve site profiles in EPA's public Superfund Website to accurately depict EPA and State actions taken to protect human health and the environment. In its response to the draft report, EPA agreed with all of our recommendations and its proposed corrective actions should address our recommendations. However, the recommendations will remain open until the agreed-upon actions are completed.