

**GAO**

Resources, Community, and Economic  
Development Division

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**Environmental  
Protection Issue Area  
Active Assignments**

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# Foreword

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This report was prepared primarily to inform Congressional members and key staff of ongoing assignments in the General Accounting Office's Environmental Protection issue area. This report contains assignments that were ongoing as of September 3, 1996, and presents a brief background statement and a list of key questions to be answered on each assignment. The report will be issued quarterly.

This report was compiled from information available in GAO's internal management information systems. Because the information was downloaded from computerized data bases intended for internal use, some information may appear in abbreviated form.

If you have questions or would like additional information about assignments listed, please contact Peter Guerrero, Director, on (202) 512-6111; or Stanley Czerwinski, Associate Director, on (202) 512-6520.

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## ***Environmental Protection***

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### **HAZARDOUS AND SOLID WASTES**

**TITLE: STATE VOLUNTARY CLEANUP PROGRAMS (160318)**

**BACKGROUND :** Many states operate voluntary cleanup programs which allow private parties to initiate site cleanups without being compelled to do so by hazardous waste law. These programs may lead to an increased number of cleanups and economic redevelopment. Several Superfund reauthorization bills encourage establishing voluntary cleanup programs.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What are the components of a voluntary cleanup program (VCP), and which states have these components? (2) What are the benefits of using a VCP to clean up sites? (3) What are the drawbacks or limitations of VCPs? (4) How do federal government policies affect state voluntary cleanup programs?

**TITLE: SUPERFUND: DELEGATION OF THE PROGRAM TO THE STATES (160337)**

**BACKGROUND :** Greater Delegation of the Superfund program to the states is supported by many in the Congress and by the Administration. The key remaining questions concern how a delegated program would be successfully implemented. Understanding the benefits and limitations of delegation could affect how Congress crafts the legislation and how EPA implements it.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** Question #1: What lessons (both positive and negative) can be learned from states that have had the most experience leading Superfund cleanups? Question #2: How can EPA best ensure that program delegation is successful?

**TITLE: SUPERFUND: USE OF NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE SETTLEMENTS (160352)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Superfund law allows some federal agencies to seek damages from private parties for injured natural resources (e.g., fish and animals). Current reauthorization debates focus on the number of settlements and the use of dollars collected.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** To determine (1) the number of federal natural resource damage settlements under Superfund, and (2) what dollars have been collected and if/how the moneys have been spent.

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### **HAZARDOUS AND SOLID WASTES**

**TITLE: EPA'S OVERSIGHT OF INCINERATION AT SUPERFUND SITES (160357)**

**BACKGROUND :** EPA's use of incineration at Superfund sites has become increasingly controversial as public opposition to incineration has grown. Opposition groups and individuals living in the vicinity of the four Superfund incinerators currently operating want assurance that the emissions will not result in adverse health effects.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What are the requirements for EPA's oversight of operations at Superfund incinerators? (2) Is EPA monitoring Superfund incinerators in accordance with these requirements?

**TITLE: HRA 12: HIGH RISK III (160358)**

**BACKGROUND :** Our Superfund High Risk reports raise three concerns about EPA's management of this \$15 billion program: (1) EPA's need to allocate its cleanup resources according to the health and environmental risks posed by hazardous waste sites, (2) the limited recovery of cleanup costs from private parties, and (3) weak contract management.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) Has EPA assessed the risks associated with environmental problems and prioritized those risks to accommodate limited funding? (2) Has EPA increased its reimbursement rates for government-funded cleanups? (3) What is the status of EPA's efforts to improve contract management, particularly in estimating and auditing contact costs?

### **AIR QUALITY**

**TITLE: EVALUATION OF U.S. AND OTHER COUNTRIES' EFFORTS TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS (160316)**

**BACKGROUND :** Most scientists believe that increases in greenhouse gas emissions will cause a rise in global temperature of between 2 and 6 degrees fahrenheit over the next century with potentially serious results. To deal with this problem, the 1992 Climate Change Convention set voluntary goals for developed countries aimed at returning emissions to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What progress has the U.S. and other developed countries made toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels? (2) What are the major obstacles inhibiting the progress of such efforts in the U.S. and other developed countries?

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### **AIR QUALITY**

**TITLE: REVIEW OF COSTS/BENEFITS AND EMPLOYMENT IMPACTS OF CLEAN AIR REGULATIONS (160341)**

**BACKGROUND :** Estimates show that implementation of the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 could cost \$30 billion or more per year. The amendments require GAO and EPA to report on the costs, benefits, and employment impacts of the Act. Executive orders also require EPA to prepare Regulatory Impact Analyses (RIAs) that identify the costs and benefits of all major regulations.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1. What are the estimated costs, benefits, and employment impacts--identified in the RIAs--for major air regulations issued since November 1990? 2. Are the data and analysis contained in the RIAs consistent with EPA and OMB guidelines? 3. How does EPA track the costs of preparing RIAs and what are those costs?

**TITLE: REVIEW OF PROCUREMENT PRACTICES OF EPA'S OFFICE OF MOBILE SOURCES (160355)**

**BACKGROUND :** In response to concerns over EPA's funding of auto emissions programs, EPA provided data to the Congress on the amount and purpose of contracts and grants issued or used by EPA's Office of Mobile Sources. GAO issued 2 reports stating that EPA's contracts and grants data were incomplete.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** What tasks were completed under each I/M related work assignment and grant issued or used during the period 11/5/92 through 9/30/95?

**TITLE: EPA'S COST OF PREPARING REGULATORY IMPACT ANALYSES (160363)**

**BACKGROUND :** The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 require EPA to issue a significant number of new regulations. Executive Orders 12866 and 12291 direct EPA to prepare Regulatory Impact Analyses (RIAs) to estimate the costs and benefits for major regulations. EPA relies heavily on contractor support to prepare these RIAs.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1. Does EPA have a systematic way of identifying and monitoring the costs of preparing RIAs? 2. What have been EPA's costs of preparing selected RIAs for implementing regulations required by the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990?

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### **WATER QUALITY**

**TITLE: REVIEW OF DRINKING WATER QUALITY IN PRIVATE WELLS AND PUBLIC WATER SYSTEMS (160362)**

**BACKGROUND :** Under the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA), EPA is responsible for establishing standards for water quality at public water systems. Although there are no federal standards for the quality of drinking water from private wells, some state and local governments have established construction standards and/or testing requirements.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** Q1: To what extent does the drinking water obtained from private wells meet SDWA quality standards? Q2: To what extent does the drinking water provided by public water systems meet SDWA standards? Q3: How does the water quality in private wells and public water systems compare? Q4: What is the nature and extent of governmental oversight of these drinking water sources?

### **MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET**

**TITLE: U.S. GOVERNMENT FUNDING OF INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES (160326)**

**BACKGROUND :** The U.S., in support of international environmental agreements, provides funding to agencies and organizations that carry out environmental activities. The assignment is intended to provide the Congress with information on the amount of U.S. government funding for such activities since 1990.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What did the 5 agencies spend in support of the 12 selected agreements on the reported FY 1993-1995? (2) What funding has the U.S. provided to the organizations, and what types of environmental programs and activities has such funding supported?

**TITLE: STATUS OF EPA'S IMPLEMENTATION OF IT'S PEER REVIEW POLICY (160339)**

**BACKGROUND :** The credibility of EPA's regulations depend upon sound science. To ensure the soundness of its science, the results of EPA's scientific and technical activities must be independently peer reviewed. However, EPA has only recently put such procedures in place.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1. What are EPA's current peer review policies and procedures? 2. Is EPA following these policies and procedures?

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### MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

**TITLE: WASTEWATER STATE REVOLVING LOAN FUNDS (160354)**

**BACKGROUND :** From FY 1988-96, the federal government has invested over \$11 billion in the State Revolving Fund (SRF) Program. Through this program, EPA provides grants to states to establish revolving funds for constructing wastewater treatment facilities and related purposes. The Congress is concerned that it may be appropriating funds faster than the states can lend them out.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** To assist the Congress in its consideration of EPA's FY 1998 budget, we will provide information on (1) how much of selected states' available state revolving funds has been lent, (2) what impediments, if any, selected states are encountering in lending out funds, and (3) if any selected states are having problems lending funds, what action EPA has taken to help.

**TITLE: REVIEW OF EPA EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ITS PLANNING, BUDGETING, AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS (160359)**

**BACKGROUND :** A NAPA study concluded that EPA lacks strategic direction, goals, and focus. In response to the study, EPA has developed a proposal to improve its planning, budgeting, and accountability (PBA) processes. However, EPA's proposal is devoid of the details of how and when this initiative will be implemented. Also, many activities critical to its successful implementation are missing.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What is EPA's implementation plan and schedule for the proposal? (2) What is the status of the development of a PBA system, including risk-based agency goals; information for risk-based decisionmaking; and environmental performance indicators? (3) What organizational changes are needed to integrate these functions across EPA.

**TITLE: REVIEW OF EPA'S COMMON SENSE INITIATIVE FOR REGULATORY REFORM (160361)**

**BACKGROUND :** Regulatory reinvention is the new way EPA is carrying out its mission. EPA's reinvention "centerpiece" is the Common Sense Initiative (CSI), designed to find ways to achieve better environmental compliance while reducing costs on the regulated community. Two of CSI's six pilot industries are comprised primarily of small businesses.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) What performance objectives and measures has EPA established to help the agency assess whether CSI is meeting its goals? (2) Has CSI been designed to take into consideration the need to comply with various legislative requirements such as the Paperwork Reduction Act? (3) How well does the CSI respond to small business community needs?



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### **FEDERAL FACILITIES**

**TITLE: ACCELERATED HAZARDOUS WASTE CLEANUPS AT FEDERAL FACILITIES (160329)**

**BACKGROUND :** Estimated costs to clean up federal hazardous waste sites are estimated to range from \$234 billion to \$389 billion. GAO's past work has shown that progress in this effort has been very limited.

Responding to criticism by GAO and others, EPA in 1992 initiated a Superfund Accelerated Cleanup Model (SACM) to streamline the complicated and time-consuming cleanup process.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** (1) Have federal agencies fully implemented the SACM concepts? (2) Are there opportunities to speedup waste removals and cut cleanup costs at federal hazardous waste sites?

**TITLE: LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS OF DISPUTE RESOLUTION UNDER FEDERAL FACILITY CLEANUP AGREEMENTS AND HAZARDOUS WASTE PERMITS (160360)**

**BACKGROUND :** Federal agencies are subject to fines and penalties imposed by EPA if hazardous waste permit terms or cleanup agreements are violated. Dispute resolution procedures are invoked when an agency disagrees with the stipulated penalties. Notwithstanding the final outcome, parties involved with the dispute can incur extensive legal and administrative costs.

**KEY QUESTIONS :** 1. What is the total number of formal disputes at federal facilities under interagency environmental remediation agreements and hazardous waste permits? 2. What are the legal and administrative costs associated with resolving the disputes?