



Superfund Today

FOCUS ON FIVE-YEAR REVIEWS INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

Checking Up On Superfund Sites: The Five-Year Review

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducts regular checkups, called five-year reviews, on certain Superfund sites. EPA looks at sites where cleanup left wastes that limit site use. For example, EPA will look at a landfill to make sure the protective cover is not damaged and is working properly. EPA will also review sites with cleanup activity still in progress after five years.

In both cases, EPA checks the site to make sure the cleanup continues to protect people and the environment. The EPA review team conducts the review and writes a report on its findings. At some sites, other federal agencies, a state agency, or an Indian tribe may do the review, but EPA stays in the process and approves the report.

The Five-Year Review is:

- a regular EPA checkup on a Superfund site that has been cleaned up—with waste left behind—to make sure the site is still safe;
- a way to make sure the cleanup continues to protect people and the environment; and
- a chance for you to tell EPA about site conditions and any concerns you have.

During the review, EPA studies information on the site, including the cleanup and the laws that apply, and inspects the site to make sure it continues to be safe. EPA needs information from people who are familiar with the site. As someone living close to the site, you may know about things that can help the review team decide if it is still safe.

Here are some examples of things to tell EPA about:

- Broken fences, unusual odors, dead plants, materials leaving the site, or other problems
- Buildings or land around the site being used in new ways
- Any unusual activities at the site, such as dumping, vandalism, or trespassing
- Ways the cleanup at the site has helped the neighborhood.

For More Information ...

... about a Superfund site in your neighborhood, please call the toll-free Superfund/RCRA Hotline at 1-800-424-9346 or the Community Involvement Coordinator in the EPA regional office for your state. Your local EPA office can tell you where you can go to review files on every Superfund site in your area. Often, EPA holds community meetings to let people who live near a site know about site activities. You also may find useful information on the Superfund home page (www.epa.gov/superfund). For more information on the review process, see “Comprehensive Five Year Review Guidance,” EPA 540-R-01-007, OSWER 9355.7-03B-P, June 2001.

The Five-Year Review:

Continuing to Protect You and the Environment

Step 1: Develop Plan

To plan a five-year review, the site manager forms a review team, which may include an EPA Community Involvement Coordinator, scientists, engineers, and others. The team members decide what they will do at the site and when they will do it. The Community Involvement Coordinator is the member of the team who works with your community during the review.

Your role: EPA will announce the start of the review, probably through a notice in a newspaper or a flyer. Review the notice to see when the review will start.

Step 2: Collect Information

The review team members collect information about site cleanup activities. They talk with people who have been working at the site over the past five years, as well as local officials, to see if changes in local policy or zoning might affect the original cleanup plan. The team usually visits the site to see if the cleanup equipment is working properly, to take new samples, and to review records of activities during the past five years. They may give you a call or meet with you in person.

Your role: If you know anything about unusual site activities at or around the site, such as trespassing or odors, or have any other concerns, call the Community Involvement Coordinator at once.

Step 3: Ensure Safety, Announce Findings, and Publish Report

The review team uses the information collected to decide if your community and the environment are still safe from the contaminated material left at the site. If the cleanup activities are keeping people and the environment safe, the team calls them “protective.” When cleanup goals are not being met, or when problems come up, the review team will call the cleanup activities “non-protective.” When the team finishes the five-year review, it writes a report about the information that includes background on the site and cleanup activities, describes the review, and explains the results. The review team also writes a summary and announces that the review is finished. They tell your community (via public notices, flyers, etc.) where to find copies of the report and summary—at a central place called the site repository—for anyone to see.

Your role: Read about the site and learn about the cleanup methods being reviewed. Review the report. Ask the Community Involvement Coordinator any questions you have about the site.

What Happens After The Review?

As long as contaminated materials at the site stop people from freely using the land, EPA will do a review every five years. EPA also regularly monitors the site based on an operations and maintenance plan it develops. For example, the site manager may visit the site and read reports about activities at the site. Also, the site workers may visit the site to cut the grass, take samples, or make sure equipment is working. If you see any problems or things that concern you—don't wait for the five-year review—let EPA know right away.

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