



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We did this review to determine (1) how the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance (OECA) measures and reports enforcement and compliance effectiveness and progress, and (2) how well OECA's performance measures characterize changes in compliance or other outcomes, and provide transparency.

Background

Performance measures allow the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to chart its progress against its goals. Ensuring compliance with environmental laws and regulations is critical to accomplishing EPA's mission. EPA must publicly report its progress in the most transparent way possible so stakeholders can determine whether OECA's strategies, policies, and programs are effective.

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/2006/20051215-2006-P-00006.pdf

EPA Performance Measures Do Not Effectively Track Compliance Outcomes

What We Found

In response to our first objective, we found that OECA primarily measures progress in ensuring compliance using output measures. OECA uses several types of internal performance reports to monitor enforcement and compliance progress throughout the year, and reports progress to Congress and the public in several ways. Through these reports, OECA has stated it generally met its annual performance goals.

In response to our second objective, we found that OECA's 2005 publicly-reported GPRA performance measures do not effectively characterize changes in compliance or other outcomes because OECA lacks compliance rates and other reliable outcome data. In the absence of compliance rates, OECA reports proxies for compliance to the public and does not know if compliance is actually going up or down. As a result, OECA does not have all of the data it needs to make management and program decisions. What is missing most, the biggest gap, is information about compliance rates. OECA cannot demonstrate the reliability of other measures because it has not verified that estimated, predicted, or facility self-reported outcomes actually took place. Some measures do not clearly link to OECA's strategic goals. Finally, OECA frequently changed its performance measures from year to year, which reduced transparency.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Enforcement and Compliance Assurance:

- Design and implement a pilot project to verify estimated, predicted, and facility self-reported outcomes, and report on the pilot's results to demonstrate the reliability of such performance measures;
- Improve the linkage/relationship of OECA's goals and measures in EPA strategic and budgetary documents to improve external understanding and internal usefulness; and
- Continue to improve enforcement and compliance performance measures, while continuing to publicly report key measures annually to provide the public, Congress, and other specific stakeholders a minimal amount of comparable trend data.

EPA agreed with all of our report recommendations. We also made other revisions based on EPA's comments as we determined appropriate.