


GAO
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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-686](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

In September and October 2001, the first cases of anthrax bioterrorism occurred in the United States when letters containing anthrax were mailed to congressional leaders and members of the news media. As the cleanup of the Capitol Hill anthrax site progressed, EPA's estimates of the cleanup costs steadily rose. GAO was asked to describe (1) the costs EPA incurred to conduct the cleanup and how it was funded, (2) the extent to which EPA awarded the cleanup contracts competitively, (3) EPA's oversight of the contractors' work and any suggested changes to EPA's contracting practices, and (4) the extent to which EPA agreed to indemnify contractors against liability for potential damages related to the cleanup.

What GAO Recommends

To enhance EPA's contract oversight, GAO recommends that the EPA Administrator require all EPA regions to more consistently use two contract oversight practices and to examine expanding the use of another.

EPA officials agreed to implement or consider implementing GAO's recommendations. Their comments and our response are discussed at the end of this report.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-686.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact John Stephenson (202) 512-3841 or stephensonj@gao.gov.

CAPITOL HILL ANTHRAX INCIDENT

EPA's Cleanup Was Successful; Opportunities Exist to Enhance Contract Oversight

What GAO Found

EPA spent about \$27 million on the Capitol Hill anthrax cleanup, using funds from its Superfund program. From the outset, many uncertainties were associated with the cleanup effort, including how to remove anthrax from buildings. EPA revised its November 2001 estimate of \$5 million several times during the cleanup as the nature and extent of the contamination became fully known and the solutions to remove and properly dispose of the anthrax were agreed upon and carried out. To conduct the cleanup, EPA relied extensively on the existing competitively awarded Superfund contracts it routinely uses to address threats posed by the release of hazardous substances. Specifically, about 80 percent of the contract costs were incurred under 10 of EPA's existing Superfund contracts.

EPA dedicated significant resources to overseeing the many contractors working on the Capitol Hill anthrax cleanup—including about 50 staff from nine regional offices experienced in leading and overseeing emergency environmental cleanups. Most often, these staff ensured that the contractors were on site and performing assigned tasks efficiently. EPA also assigned an administrative specialist to ensure that contract charges were accurate and reasonable. EPA's assessment of its emergency responses to the anthrax incidents, which focused on or included the Capitol Hill site, concluded that, overall, the agency had used its contracts effectively but that it could improve some areas of its contracting support. In addition, GAO's review of the Capitol Hill cleanup revealed inconsistencies in EPA's cost oversight practices among regions. For example, EPA uses a computerized system for tracking contractor costs for hazardous substance removal contracts, but regions use the system inconsistently for the technical assessment contracts also used during emergency responses. Consistent use of the system would likely improve the quality of EPA's nationwide contract data and enhance EPA's oversight capabilities.

EPA agreed to indemnify two contractors with key roles in the fumigation of the Hart Senate Office Building with chlorine dioxide gas against liability that could have resulted if a third party had been injured by the contractors' release of a harmful substance, including anthrax.

Cleanup Personnel Prepare Duct Work for Air Sampling



Source: EPA.