



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We evaluated the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Superfund Alternative (SA) sites approach. This approach is designed to help achieve EPA's strategic goal of cleaning up hazardous waste sites.

Background

Since the 1980s, EPA has used variations of the SA approach to clean up Superfund National Priorities List (NPL) equivalent hazardous waste sites. The SA approach is an alternative to listing sites on the NPL. The NPL is a list of the Nation's highest priority Superfund sites. Recent reviews have reported problems in EPA's managing and implementing the SA approach.

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/2007/20070606-2007-P-00026.pdf

EPA Needs to Take More Action in Implementing Alternative Approaches to Superfund Cleanups

What We Found

EPA has not implemented effective management tools or controls for the SA approach. For example, (1) EPA has not finalized the universe of SA sites, (2) it does not have controls over designating SA sites in Superfund information systems or documenting hazard assessments for SA sites, and (3) it only measures results at SA sites for one of six Superfund cleanup measures. Until EPA addresses these limits in management controls and makes these controls more transparent, it cannot demonstrate outcomes and results of the SA approach. These limits impede EPA's ability to make informed decisions about the merits of, or need for, the approach. EPA also has not provided the public reasonable assurance that SA sites rise to the level of NPL sites.

In the recent past, EPA has been criticized for mismanaging the SA approach. External parties (including parties that participate in the SA approach) and an internal EPA study report problems with the approach. These problems are likely to continue until EPA addresses internal Agency recommendations to improve the consistency and transparency of the approach. It is also likely to continue until EPA addresses other management control weaknesses and develops a communication strategy. This strategy should inform the public about SA sites, the benefits of the SA approach, and community involvement opportunities at SA sites. EPA had recognized improvements were necessary and is working to make the approach more transparent and consistent.

What We Recommend

We recommend EPA track and report cleanup progress at SA sites, and improve its communications, information, and transparency about the SA approach. EPA generally concurred with the majority of the recommendations. However, it did not provide sufficient information to describe how or when it would implement them. The Agency will need to provide sufficient information on its actions to address OIG recommendations within 90 days.