



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

Members of Congress requested that we examine several issues about the cleanup decisions, oversight, and actions at the Ringwood Mines/Landfill Superfund site (Site) located in Ringwood, New Jersey. This report addresses questions raised about cleaning up the Site and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) oversight of that cleanup.

Background

In 1983, due to concerns about groundwater and surface water contamination, EPA listed the Site on the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL). In 1994, after addressing known concerns, EPA deleted it from the NPL. However, several more cleanup actions have occurred at the Site since, prompting EPA for the first time in Superfund's history to restore a site to the NPL.

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/2007/20070925-2007-P-00039.pdf

Limited Investigation Led to Missed Contamination at Ringwood Superfund Site

What We Found

EPA's oversight of the Ford Motor Company's cleanup at the Site met many requirements. Based on the initial investigation, EPA selected a remedy that addressed groundwater and surface water concerns at the Site. EPA ensured implementation of the remedy and removal of identified paint sludge, deleted the Site from the NPL, and conducted the 5-year reviews. However, EPA did not comply with the community notification requirements when conducting the 5-year reviews.

Residents continued to discover paint sludge at the Site after EPA deleted it from the NPL in 1994. These discoveries were because EPA did not ensure that Ford's initial Site investigation was comprehensive. During the initial investigation, EPA could have ensured that Ford conducted a more comprehensive survey of the 500-acre Site and made better use of aerial photographs. In addition, EPA itself could have conducted a more thorough search for records involving waste disposal activities at the Site by enforcing disclosure requirements on Ford. Had EPA taken or enforced these actions, it may have produced information that supported a more comprehensive site investigation or identified additional paint sludge. Under EPA orders, Ford is conducting an ongoing, comprehensive Site investigation. If done properly, it should address concerns about the initial Site investigation.

EPA Region 2 managers were not regularly documenting ongoing Site visits and discussions with State managers. EPA's Records Management Manual requires documentation of such activities in certain circumstances.

What We Recommend

We recommend that EPA Region 2 ensure that: 1) Ford has submitted all relevant information regarding the company's waste disposal activities at the Site; 2) the Ringwood community receives the required notification of the initiation and results of any future 5-year reviews at the Site; and 3) appropriate EPA staff receive written guidance defining their responsibilities for complying with EPA's records management policies when conducting conversations with State officials and during site visits. In its response to the draft report, the Region agreed with recommendations 1 and 2, but did not agree with recommendation 3, which we revised to account for the Region's comments.