



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

This review was conducted in conjunction with the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency as part of its examination of relief efforts provided by the Federal Government in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We conducted this review to assess whether the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provided quality and timely information to the States, wastewater treatment facilities, and public regarding wastewater.

Background

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina caused massive damage in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama; affecting approximately 208 wastewater treatment facilities and causing damage to collection systems and raw sewage spills. Human exposure to raw sewage may cause illness ranging in severity from mild gastroenteritis to cholera.

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/2006/20060328-2006-P-00018.pdf

EPA Provided Quality and Timely Information Regarding Wastewater after Hurricane Katrina

What We Found

EPA provided quality and timely information regarding wastewater to States, wastewater treatment facilities, and the general public. The damage to the wastewater treatment facilities and their collection systems created a potentially critical health concern due to the possibility that people living in these communities would be exposed to raw sewage. Due to the risk of serious illness associated with exposure to raw sewage, decisionmakers needed information to be able to evaluate the potential risk of exposure and take steps to protect their citizens. EPA did a good job supporting States and local communities in this function. The information that EPA provided to the public was augmented by significant efforts by other Federal agencies, State agencies, and the communities themselves.

Affected States used the information that EPA provided to help them determine how best to protect rescue workers and the general public. No sewage-related illnesses were reported in the affected areas. EPA publicly reported that only about 10 percent of wastewater treatment facilities were inoperable 4 weeks after the hurricane, most of which were in Louisiana due to flooding in the New Orleans area.

We have no recommendations and plan to address lessons learned in subsequent reports.