



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to determine how well the Source Water Assessment Program (SWAP) and the voluntary Source Water Protection Program (SWPP) are helping to protect public drinking water quality.

Background

The Safe Drinking Water Act Amendments of 1996 provide the means to protect the Nation's drinking water at its source. With SWAP, EPA requires States to conduct source water assessments to analyze existing and potential threats to public drinking water quality. SWAP intends for States to follow the assessment process by developing protection programs. Though source water protection is not mandated by the statute, EPA's SWPP supports States and communities in these efforts.

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/2005/20050328-2005-P-00013.pdf

Source Water Assessment and Protection Programs Show Initial Promise, But Obstacles Remain

What We Found

Source water assessments are being used by (1) some States to improve the overall drinking water protection program by prioritizing protection efforts and program resources, and by (2) assistance organizations in education and outreach efforts in developing and implementing protection measures. However, at the local level, assessment use is limited. While seen as a good starting point, some limitations of the assessments themselves and other barriers hinder their potential for success in leading to local-level initiation and implementation of source water protection measures.

While States continue to make progress on completing source water assessments and many are developing and implementing source water protection strategies, we have identified several obstacles that hinder States' efforts to protect source water. Despite EPA's best efforts, the program remains vulnerable. For the SWAP and SWPP to support drinking water protection over the long term, EPA needs to develop a more secure and consistent funding source. States and local entities will also have to rely strongly on intra- and inter-agency coordination, program integration, partnerships, and collaborative efforts to leverage human and financial resources, technical assistance, and outreach to utilities and communities.

What We Recommend

To improve the success of Federal, State, and local source water protection programs, we recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Water:

- Issue a public statement to re-affirm that the Source Water Assessment and Protection Programs are a priority for EPA.
- Encourage States to target assessments not only to utilities, but also to local governments, councils, planners, building and zoning officials, and other stakeholders.
- Provide guidance to States on how to leverage financial and technical resources from other EPA programs, partners, and stakeholders.
- Continue to improve cooperation and coordination between States and EPA assistance contractors.
- Work with Regions and States to (1) integrate environmental programs and (2) determine how best to disseminate locally-applicable best practices for contaminant source management and motivation.

EPA generally agreed with our findings and recommendations and in some cases has taken actions to address them.