



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We sought to determine the effectiveness and outcomes achieved from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) *Contaminated Sediment Management Strategy*. In particular, we evaluated whether Federal authorities and resources provided effective solutions, and how well EPA measured Strategy effectiveness and assessed contamination.

Background

Although the extent of sediment contamination remains uncertain, EPA estimates that approximately 10 percent of the sediment underlying the Nation's surface water poses potential risks to fish, as well as to humans and wildlife that eat fish. As of 2004, there were 3,221 fish consumption advisories in place in the United States covering 24 percent of the Nation's river miles and 35 percent of its lake acres.

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/2006/20060315-2006-P-00016.pdf

EPA Can Better Implement Its Strategy for Managing Contaminated Sediments

What We Found

EPA needs to better manage its efforts to clean up contaminated sediments on a nationwide basis. Contaminated sediments are the soils, sands, organic matter, and other minerals that accumulate at the bottom of a water body and contain toxic or hazardous materials that may adversely affect human health and the environment. EPA made some progress with its *Contaminated Sediment Management Strategy*. However, the Agency cannot assure that resources devoted to addressing contaminated sediments provide the most effective and efficient solutions for reducing the environmental and human health risks posed by this national problem.

Program offices generally did not use National Sediment Inventory data for decision making, even though the inventory represents the most comprehensive source of data on contaminated sediments in the United States. EPA did not sufficiently coordinate contaminated sediment activities performed by various EPA program offices. The Agency did not develop sediment quality criteria to ensure the comparability of data gathered to assess sediment contamination and its effects. EPA contaminated sediment research efforts did not fully meet the Agency's needs, and EPA can improve coordination of its research efforts with those of other Federal agencies. The Agency also did not establish cross-program performance measures that fully evaluate the effectiveness of its Strategy and enable EPA to determine its progress. Many of these issues occurred because no program office within EPA has responsibility for overseeing contaminated sediments.

EPA's 2004 *National Sediment Quality Survey* report did not provide a complete assessment of the extent and severity of sediment contamination across the Nation, nor fully meet the requirements of the Water Resources Development Act.

What We Recommend

We recommend that EPA assign responsibility for the oversight and evaluation of the Agency's *Contaminated Sediment Management Strategy* to a committee or an office. We also recommend that EPA: develop and implement comprehensive performance measures; evaluate the need to develop sediment quality criteria; continue to improve research coordination; develop and implement a plan for using *National Sediment Quality Survey* reports; and develop and implement a plan to provide a comprehensive national assessment of contaminated sediments. EPA generally agreed with the recommendations in the draft report. The Agency will need to provide further details on its plans to address Office of Inspector General recommendations within 90 days.