



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to determine the environmental benefits and impact of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Superfund removal program, and the Agency's plan to achieve its future program goal. Superfund removals are used to respond to emergencies or accidental releases of hazardous substances and mitigate damage to the public or the environment from hazardous substance releases. EPA has established an annual Superfund removal goal of 170 EPA-lead and 170 potentially responsible party-lead removals each fiscal year through 2015.

This report addresses the following EPA Goal or Cross-Cutting Strategy:

- *Cleaning up communities and advancing sustainable development.*

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Affairs at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2013/20130311-13-P-0176.pdf

Results and Benefits Information Is Needed to Support Impacts of EPA's Superfund Removal Program

What We Found

EPA does not measure the environmental impact and benefits of the Superfund removal program. The goals of the program are measured by determining the number of removals completed rather than how removals protect human health and the environment. This measurement limitation can diminish the perceived value of the program and be an obstacle to a management focus on how removals contribute to protection of human health and the environment. Information on removal program impacts will allow EPA to better inform the public on the benefits of the program and provide a strong foundation for budget requests. EPA's current numeric removal goal appears to be attainable based on past performance, although reductions in funding or changes in state needs or capabilities may impact EPA's ability to meet its goal.

EPA's information on removals—such as the type of removal, start and completion dates, contaminant, and volume—is maintained in the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Information System (CERCLIS). However, EPA's system controls do not adequately monitor the completion of required removal actions in CERCLIS. For example, an action memo should be completed within 5 business days of each removal start, but these were missing or late for about half of all removals completed in 2007–2011. Further, CERCLIS does not monitor approval of the required exemptions to ensure EPA is in compliance with Superfund law. Much of the missing or inaccurate CERCLIS data may be in pollution reports that track removal actions. However, although EPA staff said they were working on a process to ensure that pollution report data are accurately transferred to CERCLIS, no such process currently exists. Accurate CERCLIS information is needed to ensure removal actions are justified, completed on time, and address threats to human health and the environment.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that EPA identify environmental results and benefits of the removal program, communicate those results along with existing program results, and implement system controls to ensure required CERCLIS data are entered and completed. EPA agreed with the recommendations and provided acceptable corrective actions to enhance communications of program accomplishments and to control removals data integrity. CERCLIS is expected to be integrated into the Superfund Enterprise Management System by September 2013.