



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

The Office of Inspector General of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency conducted this evaluation to determine how effectively the EPA ensures the environment in schools is healthy for children. Specifically, we looked at how the EPA implements its school environmental health programs to protect children's health.

More than 60 million students and teachers attend over 130,000 public and private schools in the United States. Poor environmental conditions in schools can inhibit learning, increase absenteeism, and pose increased risks to children's health.

In fiscal year 2011, the agency launched the Clean Green and Healthy Schools initiative to support states and communities promoting healthier school environments. The initiative's vision is that children "will grow, learn and play in clean, green, and healthy schools."

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

- *Working for environmental justice and children's health.*

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/2013/20130327-13-P-0201.pdf

The EPA Needs to Improve Management of Its School Environmental Health Efforts

What We Found

The EPA established children's health as a priority. The EPA's work on environmental health in schools includes educating school officials about asbestos risks, developing a compliance tool for schools with drinking water violations, and providing grants. Further, many states base their laws for indoor air quality in schools on the EPA's work and tools.

The EPA created the Clean Green and Healthy Schools initiative to promote healthier school environments. However, the initiative lacks necessary management controls to ensure that the EPA provides consistent implementation of the program across the United States. The agency recently developed some measures for the initiative, but those measures are not specific enough to demonstrate program outcomes. In addition, regional staff may not be able to collect the data needed to determine how the initiative is improving environmental health in schools.

As the EPA works to improve initiative management, the agency needs to take into account the impact that funding reductions may have on its school environmental health efforts. The EPA has reduced funding for the CGHS initiative, as well as reduced or eliminated funding for some related school environmental health programs. Most notably, the EPA eliminated funding for its Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools program, even though school personnel nationwide use the tools. Because of funding reductions, the EPA cut the scope of activities originally planned under the CGHS initiative, further reducing needed services to schools.

Finally, the EPA did not meet all requirements of the Healthy High-Performance Schools subtitle of the Energy Independence and Security Act. The agency was nearly 3 years late issuing school environmental health guidelines for states, which delayed assistance to the states. The EPA also did not report annually, resulting in Congress being uninformed about delays.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

The EPA should improve management controls for the CGHS initiative. This includes better planning, measures, and data collection procedures to ensure consistent regional implementation. The agency should also comply fully with the Energy Independence and Security Act. Finally, the EPA should regularly review its school environmental health programs to determine whether the agency provides sufficient regulatory and voluntary program services to address the risks to children's health in schools.

The agency agreed to all recommendations and provided corrective actions and completion dates. The recommendations remain open with corrective actions ongoing. No further response to this report is required.