



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Office of Inspector General (OIG), sought to determine whether the EPA has controls in place to ensure that its help desks, hotlines and clearinghouses are operating in an efficient and effective manner. Members of the public and other interested individuals searching the EPA's website for a telephone number to call for help with an environmental problem can find dozens of different help desks, hotlines and clearinghouses.

This report addresses the following EPA themes:

- *Making a visible difference in communities across the country.*
- *Expanding the conversation on environmentalism.*
- *Working toward a sustainable future.*

For further information, contact our public affairs office at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2013/20130926-13-P-0432.pdf

Controls and Oversight Needed to Improve Administration of EPA's Customer Service Lines

What We Found

The EPA has a variety of resources—including telephone hotlines, Web clearinghouses, and other online reference information—which the OIG has categorized as customer service lines (CSLs). The EPA's 41 external CSLs reviewed have oversight practices that vary according to the emphasis placed on monitoring, evaluating success, and providing accurate information to the public. There are no specific EPA or governmentwide guidances or standards for operating and managing CSLs. Without guidance or procedures to ensure consistent oversight of CSLs, there is limited assurance that the approximately \$5.7 million of funds used to operate 30 of the CSLs in fiscal year 2011 achieved the desired results (cost not available for 11 CSLs).

CSL information on the agency's website is incomplete. The agency lacks specific guidance regarding the identification, presentation and management of CSL information on the Web. As a result, the quality of customer service is negatively affected. In addition, the EPA's regions and program offices do not properly identify, present and manage CSL information on the Web; therefore, customers using the Internet may not be able to access relevant environmental information in a timely manner.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the EPA's Deputy Administrator develop agencywide guidance for the monitoring and oversight of EPA CSLs, and review external CSLs to determine their cost efficiency. We also recommend that the Deputy Administrator develop guidance for the identification, presentation and management of CSL information on the Internet.

The EPA agreed with the draft report's message that the agency needs to consider an appropriate policy response to improve the administration of CSLs. The agency is seeking input from the assistant, associate and regional administrators in order to develop and implement necessary improvements. We agree with the agency's actions; however, milestone dates for the development of the policy and improvements of CSLs are needed. As a result, the recommendations are unresolved.

Noteworthy Achievements

CSLs in some regions were effectively consolidated. For instance, all of Region 2's citizen complaints are consolidated into its headquarters citizen complaint database, regardless of how the complaints were received by the region. To combine resources, Region 3 has consolidated its Regional Public Information Center into an existing contract that includes the region's library, hotline, legal library and Superfund records room. To avoid the administrative burden associated with awarding and managing two contracts instead of one, the EPA plans to consolidate the operations of the Toxic Substances Control Act Hotline and the "Lead Hotline" of the National Lead Information Center.