



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

The purpose of this evaluation was to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) designation of sites that have achieved the "protective for people" and/or "ready for anticipated use" (RAU) performance measures include effective controls to ensure long-term protection to human health and the environment.

A primary goal of the EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (OSWER) is to ensure that the cleanup of contaminated sites is protective of human health and the environment. OSWER developed the Cross-Program Revitalization Measures (CPRM) to promote and communicate its cleanup accomplishments and benefits of restoring contaminated properties to environmental and economic vitality.

This report addresses the following EPA goal or cross-agency strategy:

- *Cleaning up communities and advancing sustainable development.*

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The full report is at: www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2014/20140929-14-P-0364.pdf

EPA Needs to Improve Its Process for Accurately Designating Land as Clean and Protective for Reuse

What We Found

The EPA has limited controls for verifying or testing the accuracy of CPRM information that states and grantees provide to show sites are protective for people and RAU. The EPA also does not have adequate controls to verify that these designations continue to be valid and the sites remain protective in the long term.

The EPA's lack of controls over designating sites as protective and ready for reuse calls into question the reliability and value of the designations for protecting human health.

The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act Corrective Action (RCRA CA) program does not require documentation to support the designations. The EPA could not obtain supporting documentation for six of the 16 reuse designations we reviewed. While the Brownfields program does receive the supporting documentation, it does not sufficiently review the documentation to verify accuracy. We could not verify the accuracy of the reuse designation for 10 of 32 Brownfields sites we examined. Three of these Brownfields sites were prematurely designated as RAU. These sites had asbestos contamination cleaned up after they were designated as RAU.

The Underground Storage Tank (UST) program has the fewest EPA controls for accurate RAU site designations, even though UST sites represent 99 percent of the more than 400,000 sites the EPA has designated as RAU. States submit the number of UST RAU sites to EPA, but not names or supporting documentation. Further, states do not provide information on whether institutional controls are needed at the sites, but the EPA's definition of RAU indicates it is improper to provide an RAU designation without knowing if institutional controls are needed.

Given that nearly all the EPA's RAU designations are at UST sites and that the EPA inaccurately designated sites as RAU or failed to support some of the Brownfields and RCRA CA designations, the reliability and value of the RAU measure are marginal. This creates the risk that the designations may not be sufficiently protective of human health, which is even more important when considering some of these sites may be reused as playgrounds, schools or child care facilities. Also, the EPA's public reports may contain unreliable information on site conditions.

Recommendations and Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the OSWER Assistant Administrator improve controls over its guidance, review and reporting of the CPRM measures. The agency agreed with two recommendations but disagreed with the remaining three recommendations, and resolution efforts are in progress.