



# At a Glance

## Why We Did This Review

We evaluated the effectiveness of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) oversight of hazardous waste imports to the United States. According to data from the EPA's 2011 Biennial Report, hazardous waste treatment/storage/disposal facilities in the United States receive and manage approximately 90,000 tons of hazardous waste annually from at least eight foreign countries. International agreements establish a notice and consent process to ensure the receiving countries are aware of and properly able to handle the waste. Once in the United States, the shipment must be accompanied by a hazardous waste manifest.

### This report addresses the following EPA goals or cross-agency strategies:

- *Cleaning up communities and advancing sustainable development.*
- *Ensuring the safety of chemicals and preventing pollution.*
- *Protecting human health and the environment by enforcing laws and assuring compliance.*

Send all inquiries to our public affairs office at (202) 566 2391 or visit [www.epa.gov/oig](http://www.epa.gov/oig).

The full report is at: [www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2015/20150706-15-P-0172.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2015/20150706-15-P-0172.pdf)

## EPA Does Not Effectively Control or Monitor Imports of Hazardous Waste

### What We Found

The EPA's actions to ensure that hazardous waste imports to the United States are received, processed and managed are incomplete and ineffective. The EPA is unable to (1) confirm that all imported hazardous waste shipments reach their intended destinations, (2) ensure hazardous waste shipments are received only by facilities that are properly permitted to handle the waste, (3) determine whether there are any lost or unaccounted for shipments of hazardous waste, and (4) block hazardous waste from coming into the country without the EPA's consent.

**The EPA lacks explicit authority to block imported shipments of hazardous waste that lack prior EPA consent. This could lead to improper handling and disposal, resulting in unknown human and environmental exposure to toxic substances, including solvents, mercury, lead or other metals.**

Review of a sample of manifests returned to the EPA found that some shipments occurred outside the consented time frame, incorrectly identified the generator, or had unusually long transit times. More than half of the manifests reviewed were not accompanied by an EPA consent letter or other acceptable documentation as required by federal regulations. Further, the EPA letters consenting to imports did not consistently include sufficient information to verify that the types of hazardous waste shipped are those that have received consent.

Based on our assessment of data in EPA information systems, the EPA has an incomplete picture of hazardous waste entering the country. This can give rise to undetected and unenforced violations of federal hazardous waste laws, which could result in unknown human and environmental exposure to toxic substances. Also, the EPA does not review manifests or data to identify regulatory violations and pursue appropriate enforcement actions consistent with federal laws for importing hazardous waste. The EPA's enforcement options are restricted by a lack of authority to prevent unconsented shipments from entering the United States.

### Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the EPA implement controls to ensure identification and tracking of all hazardous waste import shipments, develop and implement procedures to identify and pursue administrative and enforcement actions to address deficiencies in the current process, and seek explicit statutory authority to prevent the import of hazardous waste without prior and explicit EPA consent. We revised the draft report recommendations after discussion with the agency, and the agency now agrees with all recommendations.