



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We sampled sites that were designated ready for reuse to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) data supporting the designations were accurate. The sampling results reported here were used to support two prior Office of Inspector General (OIG) reports: (1) *EPA Needs to Improve Its Process for Accurately Designating Land as Clean and Protective for Reuse*, which assessed the EPA's designations of sites with former or current contamination; and (2) *Hyperspectral Imaging Can Be a Useful Evaluation Tool for Office of Inspector General Reviews Focused on Contaminated Land*, which identified the usefulness of a tool to identify certain conditions at contaminated sites. The complete sampling results are reported here for the first time.

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

- *Cleaning up communities and advancing sustainable development.*

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

The full report is at: www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2015/20150721-15-P-0221.pdf

Independent Environmental Sampling Shows Some Properties Designated by EPA as Available for Use Had Some Contamination

What We Found

The EPA OIG, in collaboration with scientists from the U.S. Geological Survey, conducted soil sampling at 21 Brownfields and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act Corrective Action sites in Florida and South Carolina (both in EPA Region 4) and in Louisiana and Texas (both in EPA Region 6). The OIG soil sample results are not EPA-validated data, but are considered screening-level data.

Some OIG sampling results showed contamination was still present at sites designated by the EPA as ready for reuse. This was unexpected and could signal a need to implement changes to ensure human health protection.

Most results of the soil samples we collected from sites that had been designated by the EPA as "ready for anticipated use" met the standards to protect human health. However, unexpectedly, some results showed contamination was present. Specifically, and commendably, 241 results, or 95 percent, met standards, while 14 results, or 5 percent, did not meet standards. We did not expect soil samples at sites designated by EPA as ready for reuse to have the contamination our sampling detected. The contamination detected could result in the need to remove the sites' designations as ready for reuse or other actions to ensure the sites are safe for humans. The OIG soil results that did not meet health standards need to be evaluated by the regions in the context of other site-specific information to determine whether changes in site designations or other actions need to be completed to ensure site protectiveness.

Recommendations and Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that EPA Regions 4 and 6 add the information in this report to the appropriate site-specific case files. We also recommend that those regions assess the soil sampling results that did not meet the established standards in the context of other information on site conditions and uses, order confirmatory sampling if appropriate, and take action as needed with the site owners and states to ensure that the sites meet standards for their designated uses. Further, based on the outcomes, the two regions should reevaluate the sites' ready-for-anticipated-use designations and modify as appropriate based on other actions recommended here. The agency agreed to take sufficient corrective actions, and actions on the recommendations have either been completed or are underway.