



# At a Glance

*Catalyst for Improving the Environment*

## Why We Did This Review

This review was conducted in conjunction with the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency as part of its examination of relief efforts provided by the Federal Government in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Based on our prior reviews of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) response to Katrina, this report identifies lessons learned from the Katrina response. We also examined whether EPA followed its emergency response protocols, including those lessons learned from the World Trade Center collapse and the Agency's responsibilities as delineated in the National Response Plan, in responding to Katrina.

## Background

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall on the Mississippi coast. Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast of Mississippi and Southeastern Louisiana, and caused extensive flooding in New Orleans and extensive damage to the environmental infrastructure in the region.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Liaison at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:  
[www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2006/20060914-2006-P-00033.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2006/20060914-2006-P-00033.pdf)

## Lessons Learned: EPA's Response to Hurricane Katrina

### What We Found

In our prior reports on EPA's response to Katrina, we reported that EPA, Mississippi, and Louisiana took extraordinary efforts to assess and restore public drinking water supplies after Hurricane Katrina, and that EPA provided timely and quality information to address wastewater and hazardous materials and debris concerns. EPA generally followed its emergency response protocols to ensure that environmental concerns were addressed. Further, the actions taken by EPA and the States in response to Hurricane Katrina generally improved upon the lessons learned from EPA's response to the World Trade Center collapse. EPA officials told us that planning and good working relationships with State officials were key factors in responding successfully to this emergency. While these efforts were generally successful, we identified three lessons learned.

- Coordination within EPA, with State and local officials, and with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) could have been better. In some instances, coordination problems resulted in duplicative work being completed by EPA and Louisiana officials. EPA Region 4 and USACE officials confirmed the need for more interaction between USACE and EPA before the next emergency.
- Initially, there were problems in New Orleans with the transport of drinking water in potentially hazardous tanker trucks. The Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, with assistance from EPA Region 6, established procedures, and EPA issued an administrative order to correct this situation in early October 2005. No adverse health effects were identified.
- State of Louisiana officials reported problems querying and verifying the quality of data in EPA's database used to collect floodwater results.

EPA Regions 4 and 6 have initiated actions to address the issues noted in this report for responding to future disasters.

### What We Recommend

We recommend that the Assistant Administrators for the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response and Office of Water, as part of the Agency's efforts to address lessons learned from Katrina, ensure that the corrective actions discussed in this report are implemented. EPA generally agreed with our recommendation.