



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to determine whether deletions from the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL) have (1) consistently followed U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidance and met the National Contingency Plan (NCP) criteria, and (2) been supported by complete and high quality data and analysis which provide reasonable assurance that public health and the environment are protected.

Background

Generally, EPA may delete a site from the NPL either when all appropriate responses under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act have been implemented or a response under the Act is not appropriate.

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/2008/20080820-08-P-0235.pdf

EPA Decisions to Delete Superfund Sites Should Undergo Quality Assurance Review

What We Found

As of September 2007, EPA had deleted 322 sites from the NPL. Among the eight sites we reviewed, documentation for the Agency's decision to delete three sites was not consistent with EPA guidance. The Agency's decisions for two of these sites were also not consistent with criteria specified by EPA guidance and not supported by data and analysis. EPA did not ensure cleanup activities and goals were complete and remedies were fully protecting human health and the environment before deleting these two sites.

Response actions are ongoing at one of the three sites where the decisions did not meet the criteria specified by EPA guidance. However, EPA needs more data on the response before it will be able to determine whether this site remains able to protect human health and the environment. For the second site, EPA has not ensured that appropriate response actions were taken to address all regulated substances at the site and that monitoring requirements were met. EPA also has not ensured that the cleanup requirements were met after the third site was deleted.

EPA has conducted limited national oversight of deletion decisions made by EPA's regional offices. National review of deletions is limited because regions do not always submit required information. When reviews of decisions and documents did occur, EPA did not verify that sites met criteria specified in Agency guidance. Other reasons for the deletion problems include misinterpretation or noncompliance with deletion requirements.

What We Recommend

We recommended that EPA implement a national quality assurance process that ensures deletion decisions meet criteria specified by EPA guidance and the NCP and are supported. We also recommended actions to ensure better support for deletion decisions and oversight of ongoing cleanup activities at the deleted sites we reviewed. EPA agreed with our recommendations. The recommendations will remain open until they are fully implemented.