



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We undertook this review to determine how well the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) planned to ensure success in its enforcement priority areas. We reviewed current priority area strategies for air toxics, combined sewer overflow, and mineral processing.

Background

EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance (OECA) focuses on core program activities and a limited number of national priorities. Through the national priorities, OECA directs its resources to significant environmental problems where patterns of noncompliance have been established and where a direct federal role is needed.

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/2008/20080925-08-P-0278.pdf

EPA Has Initiated Strategic Planning for Priority Enforcement Areas, but Key Elements Still Needed

What We Found

OECA has instituted a process for strategic planning in its national enforcement priority areas. It has developed strategic planning guidance and a strategy template to facilitate continual review and improvement of the strategies. The Fiscal Years 2008-2010 strategic plans we reviewed, for air toxics, combined sewer overflows, and mineral processing, contain an overall goal, a problem statement, a description of the current status of the priority area, anticipated environmental benefits, the facilities to be addressed, the tools to be used, and OECA Headquarters and regional responsibilities.

However, each of the plans is missing key elements to monitor progress and accomplishments and efficiently utilize Agency resources. All three strategies lack a full range of measures to monitor progress and achievements. Two strategies lack detailed exit plans. Additionally, the combined sewer overflow strategy does not address the States' key roles in attaining the strategy's overall goal. The absence of these elements hinders OECA from monitoring progress and achieving desired results in a timely and efficient manner.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Enforcement and Compliance Assurance issue policy that requires strategy documents for the priority areas to include:

- a full range of performance measures;
- exit plans; and
- the States' roles, where needed.

We also recommend that the Assistant Administrator develop a cost-effective methodology for measuring resource inputs in the national priorities.

OECA concurred with the recommendation for making improvements in priority strategy documents, and indicated how it plans to address our concerns. However, OECA did not agree with our recommendation on developing a methodology for measuring resource inputs. OECA stated that the use of input measures is an Agency-level issue and should be addressed at that level. For reasons detailed in the report, we believe the recommendation is valid.