



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

The Office of Inspector General initiated this evaluation to outline and characterize EPA's approach to environmental stewardship. We specifically wanted to learn how stakeholders defined and approached environmental stewardship, what role EPA played in promoting and fostering stewardship activities, and how effectively stewardship programs assist EPA in achieving environmental outcomes.

Background

EPA defined environmental stewardship as "behavior that includes, but also exceeds, required compliance with environmental laws and regulations." The programs selected by EPA to accomplish its stewardship goal are only a subset of a much larger group of voluntary programs. EPA defines voluntary programs as those programs that "motivate people to take actions not required by regulation that benefit the environment."

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/2005/20050217-2005-P-00007.pdf

Ongoing Management Improvements and Further Evaluation Vital to EPA Stewardship and Voluntary Programs

What We Found

We asked a selected sample of stakeholders to define stewardship, list motivators and obstacles to participating in stewardship programs, and outline key roles for EPA to play to encourage and foster participating in environmental stewardship activities. The definitions and views of the selected stakeholders were generally broader than what EPA has articulated to date, and varied based on their role in stewardship programs. Based on these interviews, we determined that EPA needs to identify motivators and barriers to participation, and continue to incorporate stakeholder feedback into planning, designing, and implementing stewardship programs. EPA should also examine what roles it should play in promoting stewardship activities.

EPA has created a strategic goal that utilizes stewardship programs to achieve environmental outcomes and offer ways for participants to move above and beyond compliance. The Agency has also developed a plan to improve managing voluntary programs through better coordination, increased stakeholder interaction, and developing measurement processes. However, EPA still needs to address additional management issues. The Agency has yet to fully implement internal recommendations to strategically plan, coordinate, and manage its voluntary programs, or to develop a process for assessing these programs to determine how they will be integrated into the Agency's mission and its strategic goals and objectives.

We also found that additional program evaluation needs to be conducted to determine (1) what motivates participation in these types of programs and what causes voluntary environmental behavior change to occur, (2) the most efficient ways to measure the outcomes and impacts of stewardship and voluntary programs, and (3) which stewardship and/or voluntary programs are most effective in encouraging voluntary behavior change and achieving environmental results.

What We Recommend

We recommend that EPA (1) develop a statement that outlines how voluntary programs are expected to assist EPA in achieving its overall mission and its stewardship goals and objectives; and (2) develop criteria, guidance, and an action plan for assessing how voluntary programs will be included in the next revision of the Agency's Strategic Plan.