

GAO

Resources, Community, and Economic
Development Division

July 1995

**Environmental
Protection Issue Area
Active Assignments**

Foreword

This report was prepared primarily to inform Congressional members and key staff of ongoing assignments in the General Accounting Office's Environmental Protection issue area. This report contains assignments that were ongoing as of July 6, 1995, and presents a brief background statement and a list of key questions to be answered on each assignment. The report will be issued quarterly.

This report was compiled from information available in GAO's internal management information systems. Because the information was downloaded from computerized data bases intended for internal use, some information may appear in abbreviated form.

If you have questions or would like additional information about assignments listed, please contact Peter Guerrero, Director, on (202) 512-6111; or Lawrence Dyckman, Associate Director, on (202) 512-9692.

Contents

	Page
HAZARDOUS AND SOLID WASTES	
• REVIEW OF EPA'S MANAGEMENT OF CEMENT KILN DUST.	1
SUPERFUND	
• ALTERNATIVES TO INCINERATION AT SUPERFUND SITES.	1
<i>New</i> • POPULATION CURRENTLY SUBJECT TO HEALTH EFFECTS FROM SUPERFUND SITES.	1
<i>New</i> • REVIEW OF LONG TERM COSTS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPERFUND REMEDIES.	2
AIR QUALITY	
• RELIABILITY OF GENERAL CIRCULATION AND GLOBAL OCEAN CIRCULATION MODELS USED TO PREDICT GLOBAL WARMING.	2
<i>New</i> • REVIEW OF EPA'S BASIS FOR CONTINUING TO DISCOUNT TEST AND REPAIR I&M PROGRAMS.	2
PESTICIDES AND TOXIC SUBSTANCES	
• NON-AGRICULTURAL PESTICIDE HEALTH RELATED ISSUES.	3
• REVIEW OF FEDERAL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS TOXIC CHEMICALS IN CONSUMER PRODUCTS.	3
• U.S. PHASEOUT OF METHYL BROMIDE PRODUCTION AND USE.	3
WATER QUALITY	
• UTILIZATION OF REGULATORY FLEXIBILITY IN THE SAFE DRINKING WATER PROGRAM.	4
• REVIEW OF EPA'S NATIONAL POLLUTANT DISCHARGE ELIMINATION SYSTEM (NPDES) PROGRAM.	4
• ABOVEGROUND OIL STORAGE TANKS: STATUS OF EPA'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE REGULATION AND INSPECTIONS.	4
INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT ISSUES	
<i>New</i> • ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF INCREASED TRADE IN THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER REGION.	5
ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND MANAGEMENT	
<i>New</i> • INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT.	5

Environmental Protection

HAZARDOUS AND SOLID WASTES

TITLE: REVIEW OF EPA'S MANAGEMENT OF CEMENT KILN DUST (160278)

BACKGROUND : EPA ruled that cement kiln dust will be regulated due to its environmental and health risk. It believes that dust from burners of hazardous waste and dust from nonburners of waste both pose risks. Over the next 2 years EPA plans to develop regulations for all the dust which will likely be less costly to comply with than those for hazardous waste incinerator ash.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1) Does EPA have authority to impose fewer standards on dust than on hazardous waste incinerator ash? 2) Why did EPA conclude that both types of dust should be regulated the same? 3) Why did EPA take 15 years to rule that dust poses a risk? 4) What can be done to address risks posed by dust prior to EPA developing standards for dust control?

SUPERFUND

TITLE: ALTERNATIVES TO INCINERATION AT SUPERFUND SITES (160267)

BACKGROUND : EPA has determined incineration to be the most cost effective and efficient clean-up technology for some of the worst types of contamination at Superfund sites. However, many communities are questioning whether the risk from incinerating contaminants, particularly PCB's and dioxin, is too great to warrant its use and whether other alternative technologies are available.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What is the universe of PCB/dioxin sites? (2) What has EPA done to develop/encourage alternative technologies? (3) What are the limitations to using alternative technologies and what technologies exist for PCB/dioxin? (4) Why is incineration chosen as the remedy at PCB/dioxin sites?

TITLE: POPULATION CURRENTLY SUBJECT TO HEALTH EFFECTS FROM SUPERFUND SITES (160287)

BACKGROUND : In 1980, the \$15.2 billion Superfund program was created to clean up the most dangerous hazardous waste sites. EPA assesses the health risk Superfund sites pose both under current land use and under future changes in land use. Where EPA determines that a site poses immediate health threats to nearby populations, EPA's policy is to take short-term measures to mitigate such threats.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What percentage of Superfund sites pose risks to current populations? (2) What is the nature of Superfund health risks and which environmental media carry them? (3) Has EPA's short-term intervention program reduced current risks at Superfund sites?

Environmental Protection

SUPERFUND

TITLE: REVIEW OF LONG TERM COSTS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF SUPERFUND REMEDIES (160290)

AIR QUALITY

TITLE: RELIABILITY OF GENERAL CIRCULATION AND GLOBAL OCEAN CIRCULATION MODELS USED TO PREDICT GLOBAL WARMING (160266)

BACKGROUND : EPA uses General Circulation and Global Ocean Circulation Models to estimate the effect of greenhouse gases on future global climate. In a 1990 report, we found that several limitations in the models affect the accuracy of their estimates. Concerns have been raised that too little attention has been paid to these limitations in the development of U.S. policy decisions.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What are the limitations applicable to the various models, the accuracy and reliability of the estimates being made using the models, and the actions taken by the relevant agencies to overcome the limitations? (2) To what extent are the limitations taken into consideration in the development of U.S. policy including our participation in international agreements?

TITLE: REVIEW OF EPA'S BASIS FOR CONTINUING TO DISCOUNT TEST AND REPAIR I&M PROGRAMS (160292)

Environmental Protection

PESTICIDES AND TOXIC SUBSTANCES

TITLE: NON-AGRICULTURAL PESTICIDE HEALTH RELATED ISSUES (160238)

BACKGROUND : Exposure to lawn care products, household insecticides and other pesticide products used in and around the home are often pointed to as causing serious medical problems. Although EPA is responsible for determining that pesticide products are safe to use, the agency may not have the necessary information to make the determinations.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) Does EPA receive sufficient non-agricultural pesticide exposure/incident data to determine whether an unacceptable risk to human health is involved? (2) Does EPA adequately respond to incident data indicating potential health risks involving specific pesticides; and does the agency take appropriate action, as necessary, to regulate those pesticides?

TITLE: REVIEW OF FEDERAL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS TOXIC CHEMICALS IN CONSUMER PRODUCTS (160249)

BACKGROUND : Millions of people use products containing toxic chemicals. While EPA regulates the use of toxic chemicals in general, the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) regulates chemicals in consumer products that may pose risks to the public. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) protects workers from chemical hazards.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What information do regulatory agencies believe they need to protect consumers and workers from products containing toxic chemicals? (2) What actions are EPA, CPSC, and OSHA taking to obtain data needed to protect consumers and workers from products containing toxic chemicals?

TITLE: U.S. PHASEOUT OF METHYL BROMIDE PRODUCTION AND USE (160301)

BACKGROUND : A recent EPA rule freezes U.S. production of methyl bromide at 1991 levels until it is phased out in 2001. USDA and industry associations are concerned about the potential impacts of losing this widely used pesticide and the phaseout's consequences to U.S. agriculture and associated trade.

KEY QUESTIONS : What are key government, industry and environmentalist positions on (1) methyl bromide's ozone depletion potential, (2) suitable substitutes or alternatives being available by 2001, (3) the ban's potential trade impact, and (4) the availability of exemptions to or relief from the ban under U.S. law and the Montreal Protocol?

Environmental Protection

WATER QUALITY

TITLE: UTILIZATION OF REGULATORY FLEXIBILITY IN THE SAFE DRINKING WATER PROGRAM (160258)

BACKGROUND : The estimated costs of complying with the Safe Drinking Water Act will reach \$3 billion during the next two decades. These costs could, however, be reduced if states and water systems exercise the flexibility allowed by the Act and its implementing regulations.

KEY QUESTIONS : Q1: What types of flexibility are allowed under the SDWA and what has EPA done to exercise this flexibility? Q2: To what extent are states and water systems using the available flexibility? Q3: What are the barriers to using this flexibility? Q4: What do EPA, states, and others suggest could be done to increase the use of flexibility?

TITLE: REVIEW OF EPA'S NATIONAL POLLUTANT DISCHARGE ELIMINATION SYSTEM (NPDES) PROGRAM (160261)

BACKGROUND : Under the Clean Water Act (CWA), EPA is responsible for regulating and controlling municipal and industrial wastewater facility discharges into U.S. waters. To accomplish this, EPA established the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program which provides guidance that EPA and delegated states use in issuing discharge permits.

KEY QUESTIONS : Q1: Are there NPDES permit limit variations for the same pollutant from state to state? Q2: How do state water quality standards differ in terms of the number of pollutants and numeric criteria adopted? Q3: What other factors contribute to variations? Q4: What kind of information does EPA collect on state programs and levels of environmental protection?

TITLE: ABOVEGROUND OIL STORAGE TANKS: STATUS OF EPA'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE REGULATION AND INSPECTIONS (160303)

BACKGROUND : In a 1989 report on inland oil spills (RCED-89-65). GAO recommended that the Administrator of EPA (1) strengthen regulations governing above-ground storage tanks (AST). (2) improve inspections of those tanks, and (3) consider ways to stretch EPA's limited inspection resources. Preliminary inquiries indicate that EPA has not fully implemented some of the recommendations.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) To what extent has EPA implemented the recommendations made in the 1989 report?

Environmental Protection

INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT ISSUES

**TITLE: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF INCREASED TRADE IN THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER REGION
(160302)**

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

TITLE: INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT (160304)

BACKGROUND : Media-specific approaches to pollution control may not address all sources of pollution, and may be unnecessarily expensive. States and companies are piloting "integrated," multi-media approaches to environmental management designed to reduce the overall impact an industry or facility has on the environment.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1) What efforts are underway to integrate environmental management at the state level, and what role has EPA played in these efforts? 2) What has been the experience of these efforts to date? 3) To what extent have these efforts been evaluated, what were the outcomes of those evaluations and/or what future evaluations are planned?



