

GAO

Resources, Community, and Economic
Development Division

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Environmental Protection Issue Area

Active Assignments

Hi Jerry!
These are the 3 documents
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I think Jerry F. called you.
Think you can get them cut?
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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 October 2, 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.

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Environmental Protection

HAZARDOUS AND SOLID WASTES

TITLE: REVIEW OF EPA'S REGULATIONS AND OVERSIGHT OF FUEL BLENDING ACTIVITIES (160307)

BACKGROUND : Fuel blenders play an integral role in the management of hazardous wastes. They obtain hazardous wastes from generators or suppliers and blend the wastes to meet specifications of cement kilns. Cement kilns, in turn, substitute the wastes for their normal gas or coal fuel and burn the wastes in the process of making cement.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) Are fuel blenders in compliance with EPA's fuel blender regulations? (2) Are there loopholes that allow some facilities to package and/or blend fuel yet not be subject to EPA's regulations? (3) If blenders are mixing and cement kilns are combusting hazardous wastes containing high levels of metal, does this pose a threat to human health and the environment?

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

BACKGROUND : The Superfund program is responsible for cleaning up 1300 contaminated sites nationwide. Depending on the type of cleanup federal and state governments and private parties may face millions of dollars in ongoing operations and maintenance (O&M) cost. EPA must oversee activities at the hundreds of sites that will enter this O&M phase in the next decade.

KEY QUESTIONS : Determine (1) the extent to which operations and maintenance activities occur at NPL sites, (2) the projected costs to the federal and state governments, and private parties, and (3) EPA's actions to ensure that sites requiring O&M continue to protect human health and the environment.

Environmental Protection

SUPERFUND

TITLE: ADMINISTRATION OF THE NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE PROGRAM (160293)

BACKGROUND : The Superfund law requires the parties responsible for hazardous wastes that injure natural resources (e.g., wildlife habitat, fish, and animals) pay government agencies for the restoration, in addition to cleaning up the sites.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1. How are agencies spending the money received to restore injuries to natural resources? 2. How do federal agencies establish the dollar value claim for the injuries to natural resources? 3. What will be the future trend in terms of the number and value of natural resource damage settlements?

TITLE: SUPERFUND: STATE CLEANUP STANDARDS (160305)

BACKGROUND : The Superfund program was designed to clean up the nation's most severely contaminated hazardous waste sites. Under consideration for reauthorization, the program was authorized through 1994 at \$15.2 billion, with over 1,100 nonfederal Superfund sites. According to some estimates, the number of sites could grow to over 4,500; \$75 billion may be needed to clean them up.

KEY QUESTIONS : To what extent are state environmental standards, which EPA uses to set cleanup levels at Superfund sites, based on quantitative estimates of the risk to human health?

TITLE: EXPANDED STATE ROLE IN FEDERAL SUPERFUND PROGRAM (160314)

BACKGROUND : The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation & Liability Act (CERCLA) --Superfund--gives EPA authority to clean up hazardous waste. In 1990 CERCLA was reauthorized thru 1994, adding \$5.1 billion with no substantial changes. Pending reauthorization legislation proposes fundamentally altering federal/state relations by transferring bulk of program to the states.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What proposed criteria, such as resources and technical capacity, would states need to meet before the Superfund program is transferred? (2) Which states currently have the necessary resources and established programs/capacity to meet these criteria? (3) Under what circumstances would states be willing to assume more of the federal program?

Environmental Protection

SUPERFUND

TITLE: EPA REMOVAL ACTION AT SUTTER CREEK ABANDONED MINING PROPERTY (160317)

BACKGROUND : A housing development, known as-Mesa de Oro, was built on property--referred to as Sutter Creek--underlain by arsenic bearing mine tailings. EPA believes that this situation could present an imminent threat to public health and/or the environment and has initiated a removal action under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) Has EPA complied with National Contingency Plan mandates? (2) Has EPA determined the chemical form of the arsenic and does this warrant removal under CERCLA? (3) Has EPA determined what kind of mine tailings contain elevated levels of arsenic and where they are located? (4) Has EPA determined the fraction of the ingested dose of arsenic that can be absorbed?

TITLE: RESULTS OF EPA'S REMOVAL PROGRAM IN REDUCING HUMAN HEALTH RISKS AT SUPERFUND SITES (160320)

AIR QUALITY

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

BACKGROUND : Vehicle maintenance is critical to control urban ozone & carbon monoxide. EPA's inspection & maintenance (I&M) program is designed to get polluting vehicles repaired in major urban areas--about 64M vehicles annually. EPA assigns emissions reduction credits to I&M programs. Test-only programs receive full credit while test and repair programs receive 50% of the credits.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What is EPA's basis for continuing to discount test and repair programs by 50 percent? (2) To what extent is EPA's official response to the hearing record consistent with available data?

Environmental Protection

AIR QUALITY

TITLE: EVALUATION OF U.S. AND OTHER COUNTRIES' EFFORTS TO REDUCE GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS (160316)

TITLE: EPA CONTRACTS, GRANTS, INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS, AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR OFFICE OF MOBILE SOURCES (160324)

PESTICIDES AND TOXIC SUBSTANCES

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?

PESTICIDES AND TOXIC SUBSTANCES

TITLE: PESTICIDES: STATUS OF EPA'S REREGISTRATION OF CANCER-CAUSING FOOD USE PESTICIDES (160311)

BACKGROUND : In 1987, the National Research Council reported that a large fraction of the identified cancer risk was associated with the use of relatively few--approximately 10-- food use pesticides. According to the council, EPA was expected to complete the reregistration review of these pesticides over the next few years.

KEY QUESTIONS : Q1: What is the reregistration status of the 10 highest risk, cancer-causing food use pesticides as identified in the 1987 National Research Council report? Q2: When does EPA expect to complete the reregistration process for these pesticides?

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?

Environmental Protection

WATER QUALITY

TITLE: STATUS OF EFFORTS TO ADDRESS NON-POINT SOURCE POLLUTION (160299)

BACKGROUND : The quality of the nation's waters has improved significantly as a result of efforts initiated under the Clean Water Act. However, significant problems continue to exist that are attributable to diffuse, or "non-point" sources of pollution such as agricultural and urban runoff.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1) What progress have states made in implementing the Clean Water Act's non-point source program and what, if any, factors have impeded their efforts? 2) What are the strengths and weaknesses of proposed revisions to the program? 3) What has been the experience of other federal programs designed to address non-point sources pollution?

TITLE: COMPLIANCE WITH THE CLEAN WATER ACT (160321)

INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT ISSUES

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

BACKGROUND : In 1993, the U.S. and Mexico signed an environmental side accord to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to fund and address long-standing transboundary pollution problems. Because of the increase in pollution that accompanies expanded trade, concerns remain about the adequacy and sufficiency of environmental infrastructure in the border region.

KEY QUESTIONS : Q1: What capacity does the border region have to address environmental remediation needs, such as treatment of wastewater and drinking water, management of hazardous and solid wastes, and control of air emissions? Q2: What are the geographic areas and types of pollution problems in the border region that are the most critical and require federal action and/or funding?

Environmental Protection

MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

TITLE: POTENTIAL REDUCTIONS IN EPA'S FY 97 BUDGET REQUEST AND POTENTIAL RESCISSIONS IN PREVIOUS YEARS' APPROPRIATIONS (160294)

BACKGROUND : Relative to its annual budget (\$7 billion), EPA has substantial unliquidated obligations--\$9 billion, as of 09/94. EPA spends more than half its budget on grants and contracts.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) To what extent can EPA's fiscal year 1997 budget request be reduced and can funds appropriated in previous years be rescinded, because of schedule delays, changes in program requirements, and issues that arose after the budget request was developed?

TITLE: FUNDING OF WATER INFRASTRUCTURE STATE REVOLVING FUNDS (160295)

BACKGROUND : Under the State Revolving Fund (SRF) Program, EPA provides grants to states for establishing state revolving loan funds used principally for the construction of waste water treatment facilities. By the year 2004, after total federal funding of \$22 billion, annual appropriations are scheduled to end and state funds are supposed to be self-sufficient.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) What progress state loan funds have made toward achieving self-sufficiency by fiscal year 2004? (2) Are impediments preventing some communities from obtaining state fund loans? (3) Are appropriation and grant funding levels for the SRF program appropriate given the availability of other funding sources?

TITLE: INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT (160304)

BACKGROUND : Medium-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. Little evaluation of these pilots has been conducted.

KEY QUESTIONS : 1) What approaches have Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York taken to integrate environmental regulatory programs? 2) What has been their experience with these efforts to date? 3) What has been EPA's role in these efforts?

Environmental Protection

MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET

TITLE: REVIEW OF EPA'S LEAKING UNDERGROUND STORAGE TANK (LUST) TRUST FUND (160308)

BACKGROUND : EPA's Leaking Underground Storage Tank (LUST) program, financed by a 0.1 cent/gallon gas tax, established a fund to clean up tanks. The LUST fund currently has a \$1 billion unobligated balance, and the gas tax, unless reauthorized, will expire in FY96. Most cleanups to date, however, have been paid with State funds.

KEY QUESTIONS : Q1: What is the extent of the national problem with leaking underground storage tanks?
Q2: Given the response of the states to the problem, does the current amount of the federal trust fund and annual taxes exceed the level of federal funds needed to address the problem?

FEDERAL FACILITIES

TITLE: REVIEW OF DOD'S PROPOSAL TO DISESTABLISH THE DEFENSE ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION ACCOUNT (DERA) (709157)

BACKGROUND : In 1986 the Defense Environmental Restoration Account (DERA) was established to give services funding flexibility needed to respond to environment threats in a timely fashion. It was to (1) eliminate competition for scarce dollars between national security and environmental needs (usually resolved for national security) & (2) give Congress better oversight of DOD's base cleanup program.

KEY QUESTIONS : (1) How will services fund cleanup? (2) What procedures will be used to insure continued congressional oversight over DERA? (3) To what extent would the devolvement of DERA create the opportunity for the services to divert funds intended for environmental cleanup to other purposes? (4) Would there be efficiencies in administration or cost savings achieved?

TITLE: PRIORITY SETTING FOR FEDERAL FACILITIES CLEANUPS (160296)
