



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) evaluated the actions taken by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (OSWER) to implement its Regional Public Liaison (RPL) program. We also reviewed program changes resulting from a 2003 OIG report.

Background

Responding to the 2003 OIG report, EPA in 2004 revised its Superfund Regional Ombudsman program, renamed staff RPLs, and established national program guidance. The RPLs help the public and regulated community by (1) providing information and facilitating informal contact with EPA staff, (2) helping resolve problems, and (3) making recommendations for improvement to Agency senior management.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional, Public Affairs and Management at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2009/20090624-09-P-0176.pdf

Regional Public Liaison Program Needs Greater Focus on Results and Customer Awareness

What We Found

OSWER's RPL program does not sufficiently focus on or measure specific outputs and outcomes and is not consistently implemented across offices. RPLs report results in varied formats, and OSWER does not consolidate program results into a comprehensive report. As a result, RPLs reported annual results that could not be readily consolidated to show what RPLs had achieved. The program does not sufficiently focus on results because it lacks clear program logic. Developing a logic model would help define outputs and outcomes and encourage a results-oriented approach to program implementation. A more consistent and comprehensive approach would also raise stakeholder awareness of the RPL program.

Despite limited resources, RPLs have assisted many stakeholders since the program was revised in 2004. New guidance more clearly described program expectations and sought to provide more consistent program implementation across regional offices.

What We Recommend

We recommend that OSWER use a logic model approach to revise the RPL program to help focus on outputs and outcomes and ensure stakeholders are aware of the RPL resource. Also, OSWER should revise the 2004 RPL guidance to reflect program revisions and build in minimum requirements for stakeholder awareness activities, including a national RPL Website.

OSWER concurred and described planned corrective actions to address all of our recommendations. OSWER stated it has requested assistance from OSWER's Center for Program Analysis to conduct a logic model assessment starting during the RPLs' National Meeting, June 16-18, 2009. OSWER's response explains that this assessment will lead to revised guidance that will include minimum requirements for stakeholder awareness activities.