



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We did this review to evaluate the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) progress in meeting Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) minimum inspection requirements at hazardous waste treatment, storage and disposal facilities (TSDFs).

TSDFs manage large quantities of hazardous waste generated. There are about 60,000 facilities in the United States, which generate and manage 30 to 40 million tons of hazardous waste annually.

Eighty percent of all U.S. citizens live within 3 miles of a federally regulated hazardous waste generator or TSDF. Under RCRA, the EPA regulates all aspects of hazardous waste, including minimum TSDF inspection requirements.

This report addresses the following EPA goals or cross-agency strategies:

- *Protecting human health and the environment by enforcing laws and assuring compliance.*
- *Cleaning up communities and advancing sustainable development.*

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EPA Has Not Met Statutory Requirements for Hazardous Waste Treatment, Storage and Disposal Facility Inspections, but Inspection Rates Are High

What We Found

Overall, the EPA had a high inspection completion rate of 91 percent (656 out of a universe of 718 TSDFs reviewed). However, specific inspection completion rates varied for the three types of TSDFs: 94 percent for private TSDFs; 85 percent for federal TSDFs; and 54 percent for state or local TSDFs.

Although the EPA's overall inspection completion rate is high, the agency did not fully meet the legal requirement for inspecting 100 percent of operating TSDFs for fiscal year 2014. As noted above, the inspection rate for state and local TSDFs is just over 50 percent.

We also found that the EPA recognizes state-conducted inspections of federal TSDFs as meeting the federal inspection requirement. Because this practice was inconsistent with the EPA's documented compliance monitoring strategy, the agency updated its strategy in September 2015 to allow this practice.

Inspections deter and monitor for noncompliance. TSDF inspections can identify and reduce potential risks to human health and the environment resulting from operations that treat, store and dispose of hazardous waste. TSDF inspections have identified violations, such as storage of hazardous waste in an unpermitted area and failure to minimize the possibility of the release of hazardous waste.

The EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance (OECA) acknowledged that the agency is not meeting the inspections requirement due to resource limitations caused by other competing priorities, such as inspector training or state oversight activities. OECA was unable to provide an estimate of the additional resources it would need to meet TSDF inspection requirements.

Recommendation and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) recommended that the Assistant Administrator for Enforcement and Compliance Assurance identify and allocate resources needed to complete the required TSDF inspections. After several meetings, OECA agreed with a modified recommendation to implement management controls to complete the required TSDF inspections, and has proposed acceptable corrective actions. The recommendation is resolved. No further response from the agency is needed.

Missed TSDF inspections violate the RCRA legal requirement and can increase the risk of exposure to hazardous substances.