



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We sought to determine how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) uses the Watch List as a tool to target enforcement actions and whether there are opportunities for improvement.

Used by the EPA since 2004, the Watch List is designed to provide EPA regions and states with a list of facilities that are in significant violation of environmental laws and that appear not to have been addressed by timely and appropriate enforcement. The Watch List initially was just used as an in-house management tool, but in 2011 the EPA made its data available to the public.

This report addresses the following EPA theme:

- *Embracing EPA as a high performing organization.*

For further information, contact our public affairs office at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2013/20130930-13-P-0435.pdf

The EPA Should Assess the Utility of the Watch List as a Management Tool

What We Found

According to the EPA, the Watch List is a management tool used to identify long-standing significant violations. However, through interviews, regional questionnaires, and data analysis, we found that:

- Use of the Watch List differs among headquarters and regional enforcement programs.
- Trends in the number of facilities on the Watch List differ among enforcement programs.
- EPA staff suggest multiple opportunities for improvement in the Watch List.
- The public version of the Watch List has limited search capabilities and information.

Without a proper assessment of the Watch List, the agency runs the risk of maintaining a management tool that does not assist in tracking facilities with long-standing significant violations, has limited transparency and utility to the public, and does not meet the needs of EPA users.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the EPA Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance assess the Watch List's utility as a management tool. If the agency determines that the tool is useful, it should:

- Ensure that Watch List criteria are consistent with relevant enforcement response policies, and reassess criteria to determine relevance.
- Develop an approach for identifying and/or removing facilities on the list that have been referred elsewhere or are under a consent decree.
- Improve transparency of the publicly available Watch List to allow users to search and receive information similar to what is available internally.
- Identify and implement other improvements to the Watch List identified in the EPA's assessment.

The agency agreed with the recommendation to assess the Watch List by September 30, 2014. If the agency decides to retain the list, it will act on the remainder of the recommendations by December 30, 2014. The recommendations are resolved with corrective actions pending.