



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Office of Inspector General (OIG), assessed the EPA's oversight of the Alternative Asbestos Control Method (AACM) experiments. This review follows EPA OIG Report No. 12-P-0125, *Early Warning Report: Use of Unapproved Asbestos Demolition Methods May Threaten Public Health*, issued December 14, 2011.

In 1999, the city of Fort Worth, Texas, proposed an alternative method to demolish asbestos-containing buildings. In 2003, the EPA's Office of Research and Development (ORD), National Risk Management Research Laboratory, took over and renamed the effort the AACM. The EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance enabled the experiments by granting enforcement discretion. The ORD terminated the project in 2011 due to technical deficiencies.

The report addresses the following EPA goal or cross-agency strategy:

- *Embracing EPA as a high-performing organization.*

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The full report is at: www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2014/20140925-14-P-0359.pdf

EPA's Alternative Asbestos Control Method Experiments Lacked Effective Oversight and Threatened Human Health

What We Found

The EPA conducted the AACM and Fort Worth Method research for over a decade without appropriate oversight or an agreed research goal. This resulted in wasted resources and the potential exposure of workers and the public to unsafe levels of asbestos. This occurred because:

Improving oversight of the EPA's research activities can minimize the risk of waste, noncompliance with EPA rules and policies, and project failures.

- The EPA offices involved did not conduct the research under a controlled and defined agency process that would have ensured consensus and oversight.
- The EPA disregarded research guidance designed to ensure research quality.
- The EPA agreed not to enforce environmental laws during the research when other legal means for conducting the research were available.

The EPA spent almost \$2.3 million in contractor costs and expenses from 2004 through 2012, and \$1.2 million in research staff time on AACM experiments from 2005 through 2012. However, these figures only represent a portion of the cost, since the agency does not track contributions from outside organizations or EPA staff time by project. The high dollar cost, potential public health risks, and failure of the AACM to provide reliable data and results are management control problems that need to be addressed.

Recommendations and Planned Corrective Actions

We recommend that the EPA improve research oversight by requiring significant research to follow a controlled process, tracking project costs and contributions, and reviewing and resolving internal EPA comments. We recommend that the EPA establish a process for the review of alternative regulatory emission control method submissions, and establish and follow standard procedures. We also recommend that the EPA improve controls over issuing No Action Assurance letters. The agency generally provided acceptable corrective actions. Ten of the 11 recommendations we made are resolved and corrective actions are ongoing or completed. One recommendation is unresolved, which the agency will need to address in its final response to the report.

Noteworthy Achievements

The ORD has adopted a new process to estimate the resources expected to be used on projects, which should provide an initial cost baseline for projects.