



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We initiated this review to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) followed accepted and standard practices in determining that coal combustion residuals (CCRs) are safe for the beneficial uses it had promoted on its Coal Combustion Products Partnership (C²P²) program website.

Background

CCRs are generated from burning coal. More than 136 million tons of CCRs were generated in 2008. EPA defines beneficial use of CCRs as one that provides a functional benefit, replaces the use of an alternative material, conserves natural resources, and meets relevant product specifications and regulatory standards. Beneficial uses of CCRs include concrete manufacture or soil enhancement, among others.

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

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2011/20110323-11-P-0173.pdf

EPA Promoted the Use of Coal Ash Products With Incomplete Risk Information

What We Found

EPA did not follow accepted and standard practices in determining the safety of the 15 categories of CCR beneficial uses it promoted through the C²P² program. EPA's application of risk assessment, risk screening, and leachate testing and modeling was significantly limited in scope and applicability. Without proper protections, CCR contaminants can leach into ground water and migrate to drinking water sources, posing significant public health concerns.

EPA officials told us they relied on individual state beneficial use programs to review and approve specific CCR beneficial uses, and to manage associated risks. EPA established, but did not implement, plans in 2005 to identify environmentally safe and beneficial use practices. Had EPA implemented its plans, it may have known earlier about risks from large-scale disposal of CCRs described as beneficial use.

EPA documented these risks in damage cases presented in its June 2010 proposed rule to regulate certain CCRs. EPA stated in the proposed rule that certain uses of CCRs, in sand and gravel pits as well as large-scale fill operations, represent disposal rather than beneficial use. After release of its proposed rule, EPA stopped promoting beneficial uses of CCRs through the C²P² program. Further, in response to a recommendation from the OIG, EPA removed access to the C²P² website.

In the proposed rule, EPA sought public comment on approaches for regulating CCRs, to include information and data on beneficial uses, particularly unencapsulated uses that may present a risk to human health and the environment. Such information will help EPA make informed decisions about safe beneficial use of CCRs. EPA should also have a sound process for evaluating and analyzing risk information that forms the basis of Agency promotions on safe beneficial use of CCRs.

What We Recommend

We recommend that EPA define and implement risk evaluation practices for beneficial uses of CCRs, and that it determine if further action is warranted to address historical CCR structural fill applications. EPA agreed with these recommendations, which were revised in response to EPA suggestions. In its final response to this report, EPA should describe its specific corrective actions to address the recommendations and provide estimated completion dates for these actions.