



# At a Glance

*Catalyst for Improving the Environment*

## Why We Did This Review

We evaluated the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Superfund cost recovery at a sample of non-National Priority List (NPL) removal sites. The objectives were to determine what internal controls EPA uses to (1) monitor cost recovery, (2) ensure potentially responsible party searches are completed and documented, (3) monitor costs attributed to generic site codes, (4) ensure removal milestones are documented in the Superfund database, and (5) ensure accurate cost recovery data.

## Background

The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA, also known as Superfund) authorizes EPA to address releases of hazardous substances that require a rapid response. These actions (called removal actions) often require EPA to pay for cleanup costs before identifying a responsible party. CERCLA authorizes EPA to recover these costs.

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/2009/20090427-09-P-0144.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2009/20090427-09-P-0144.pdf)

## ***EPA Needs to Improve Internal Controls to Increase Cost Recovery***

### **What We Found**

Within a sample of removal actions we reviewed, EPA collected from responsible parties approximately 11 percent (\$31.4 of \$294.5 million) of the Federal Government's costs for conducting the removal actions. According to EPA, about another 30 percent (\$86 million) of the costs are pending further government action. EPA attributed most of the remaining \$177.1 million of unrecovered costs to a lack of viable potentially responsible parties (PRPs).

EPA has a control for monitoring the statute of limitations (SOL) on cost recovery. EPA reports show that the Agency has a high rate of success in addressing cost recovery requirements prior to the expiration of the SOL. However, EPA has limited controls in other key areas that affect its ability to recover the government's costs from responsible parties. These include limited oversight of PRP searches, inconsistent documentation of PRP searches, and data quality problems in EPA databases that track Superfund cleanup status and cost recovery. EPA also does not review and monitor charges made to all Superfund accounts so all appropriate site costs can be recovered. A sample of Superfund accounts used to capture removal costs shows as much as \$25 million that EPA could potentially pursue for cost recovery, but has not.

### **What We Recommend**

We recommend that EPA implement improved controls to (1) monitor PRP search completions, (2) document PRP searches consistently, (3) ensure data quality in EPA databases, and (4) review all appropriate Superfund accounts to ensure the government's costs are identified for possible recovery. EPA concurred with our recommendations with minor qualifications, and has proposed actions to address them. All recommendations are open with agreed-to actions pending. In its final response to this report, EPA should provide estimated or actual completion dates for recommendations 2-1 through 2-4; 3-1 and 3-2; and 4-1 through 4-3.