



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this evaluation to determine how effectively the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has fulfilled its role for managing Great Lakes Areas of Concern (AOCs) clean-ups, particularly for remediating contaminated sediments. We examined the results of EPA's Great Lakes AOC effort and assessed whether EPA has an effective strategy to meet its goals.

Background

Thirty-one AOCs have been identified around the U.S. border of the Great Lakes. All but one are polluted with contaminated sediments. To provide a funding source for sediment remediation, Congress passed the Great Lakes Legacy Act (Legacy Act) in 2002. EPA, through the Great Lakes National Program Office, is responsible for working with the States, localities, and other stakeholders to remove this contaminated sediment.

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/2009/20090914-09-P-0231.pdf

EPA Needs a Cohesive Plan to Clean Up the Great Lakes Areas of Concern

What We Found

Since 2004, EPA has completed five Legacy Act-funded contaminated sediment clean-ups and remediated approximately 800,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment. However, EPA is challenged by the overall extent of the contaminated sediment problem in the Great Lakes AOCs. EPA is the designated lead Agency for the clean-ups; however, we found EPA does not have a regime for coordinating remediation activities across its program offices as well as with States, localities, and other stakeholders. While some results have been achieved in cleaning up individual sediment sites, EPA has not developed or implemented a coordinated approach to manage clean-ups.

EPA does not know the full extent of the contaminated sediment problem. Accurate sediment estimates for more than 30 percent of the remediation sites remain unknown. Potential Great Lakes Legacy Act clean-up sites have an estimated federal cost of \$2.25 billion. Local partners will have to come up with a total of \$1.21 billion in non-federal matching funds before Legacy Act assistance is provided. We estimate that at the current rate of progress, it may take more than 77 years to complete all of these clean-ups. Moreover, remediation will be conducted in the order that individual local governments and stakeholders can afford, rather than with regard to the risks posed to human health or the environment. Without improved management, coordination, and accountability, EPA will not succeed in achieving the results intended for the AOC program.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the Great Lakes National Program Manager: (1) establish an AOC management plan that includes written designations of authority and responsibility for each EPA program office with regard to remediating contaminated sediment; (2) assign a lead EPA office to each Sediment Remediation Site and determine the volume of contaminated sediment at each site; and (3) annually measure and publish estimates of Sediment Remediation Site sediment volumes, clean-up costs, and stakeholder progress for each site.

EPA concurred with developing a limited management plan (but not designating site-specific leadership authorities), and proposed that this management plan would also be updated to include annual reporting on Sediment Remediation Sites. However, these actions are insufficient and do not meet the intent of the recommendations. The recommendations are unresolved.