



Office of Inspector General U.S. Environmental Protection Agency **At a Glance**

22-P-0046
May 17, 2022

Why We Did This Audit

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Inspector General conducted this audit to determine whether the EPA implemented agreed-upon corrective actions in response to [OIG Report No. 18-P-0221, Management Weaknesses Delayed Response to Flint Water Crisis](#), issued July 19, 2018, as well as whether those actions effectively addressed the identified program deficiencies.

After Flint, Michigan, switched its drinking water supply in April 2014, inadequate treatment of the water exposed residents to lead. Due to EPA, state, and city oversight lapses, this contamination was not identified or mitigated in a timely manner. To improve the EPA's oversight of state drinking water programs and response to drinking water emergencies, our 2018 report issued nine recommendations: five jointly to the Offices of Water and Enforcement and Compliance Assurance, one to the Office of Water, and three to EPA Region 5.

This audit supports EPA mission-related efforts:

- *Ensuring clean and safe water.*
- *Compliance with the law.*
- *Operating efficiently and effectively.*

This audit addresses a top EPA management challenge:

- *Integrating and leading environmental justice, including communicating risks.*

Address inquiries to our public affairs office at (202) 566-2391 or [OIG WEBCOMMENTS@epa.gov](mailto:OIG_WEBCOMMENTS@epa.gov).

[List of OIG reports.](#)

The EPA Needs to Fully Address the OIG's 2018 Flint Water Crisis Report Recommendations by Improving Controls, Training, and Risk Assessments

What We Found

The EPA certified that it completed corrective actions to address all nine recommendations issued in our 2018 report. However, the EPA's corrective actions for three recommendations—Recommendations 1, 6, and 8—did not fully address the identified deficiencies in oversight. Specifically:

Without complete oversight of the drinking water program, the public's health is still at risk from lead in drinking water.

- The Office of Water did not establish controls to require that states are monitoring water system compliance with all Lead and Copper Rule requirements.
- The Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance could not confirm who received training on Safe Drinking Water Act tools and authorities.
- The Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance did not incorporate functions into its Report a Violation system to assess risks associated with citizen tips and to track resolution of these tips.

The Safe Drinking Water Act gives the EPA emergency authority to act when a contaminant may present an "imminent and substantial endangerment" to human health and when the appropriate state and local authorities have not acted to protect the public. Because the EPA did not fully implement corrective actions addressing the 2018 OIG report, residents whose homes are served by lead service lines may continue to be exposed to lead in drinking water, EPA personnel may not be familiar with how to employ Safe Drinking Water Act tools and authorities, and citizens' tips may not be effectively monitored and used to alert the EPA of public health concerns.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

In response to this follow-up audit, the Office of Water began requiring EPA regions to annually review whether states monitor water system compliance with the Lead and Copper Rule. We therefore consider the corrective action for Recommendation 1 of our 2018 report complete. To fully address Recommendations 6 and 8 of our 2018 report, we make two recommendations for the assistant administrator for Enforcement and Compliance Assurance to document Safe Drinking Water Act training attendance and to enhance the Report a Violation system to assess and track citizen tips. The EPA agreed with the training recommendation, which is resolved with corrective actions pending. Based on the Agency's response to our draft report, we revised the recommendation related to the Report a Violation system; that recommendation is unresolved with resolution efforts in progress. Where appropriate, we revised the report based on technical comments provided by the EPA.