



At a Glance

Evaluation of Institutional Controls at the Cornell Dubilier Electronics Inc. Superfund Site in South Plainfield, New Jersey

Why We Did This Evaluation

To accomplish this objective:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Inspector General conducted this evaluation to determine whether the EPA's institutional controls related to Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act-funded remedial activities at the Cornell Dubilier Electronics Inc. Superfund site in South Plainfield, New Jersey, will minimize human exposure to site contaminants. The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act, commonly known as Superfund, authorizes the EPA to clean up contaminated sites. The EPA develops records of decision for each Superfund site that outline the cleanup remedies to be implemented. If contamination at the site remains above allowable levels, the EPA must review the remedies every five years to ensure their effectiveness.

The EPA allocated \$170 million from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to divert surface water and dredge approximately three miles of the Bound Brook running adjacent to the Cornell Dubilier Electronics Superfund site. This remedy requires the implementation of institutional controls, such as advisory signs. The Cornell Dubilier Electronics Superfund site is in EPA Region 2.

To support these EPA mission-related efforts:

- *Cleaning up and revitalizing land.*
- *Partnering with states and other stakeholders.*

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[List of OIG reports.](#)

What We Found

The fish advisory signs, an informational device used at the Cornell Dubilier Electronics Inc., or CDE, Superfund site, do not align with the EPA's guidance for fish consumption advisories and do not reflect the requirements documented in the record of decision for a portion of the site known as Operable Unit 4. For example, the signs do not communicate the presence of polychlorinated biphenyls, commonly referred to as PCBs, nor do they specify the associated health impacts of consuming contaminated fish. As a result, the potential of this institutional control to minimize human exposure to site contaminants may be reduced.

Also, the EPA's community engagement strategy for the CDE Superfund site does not align with the EPA's statement that the strategy is based on regulation and Agency guidance. Specifically, it is not based on recent, formal interviews from the community. The EPA issued the site's original community involvement plan, which outlines the community engagement strategy, in 2000 after conducting interviews. However, while the EPA site team updated the community involvement plan in 2020, it had not performed any additional interviews as of October 2024. Some of the EPA's site information and reporting is also incomplete or inaccurate. For example, five-year review reports for the site do not describe whether, how, and when the EPA inspected and evaluated the institutional controls along the Bound Brook. The EPA also does not have the most recent community involvement plan in the site's local information repository, and the site's profile page on the EPA website depicts additional areas of investigation not directly linked to the site, which may cause confusion.

Incomplete, unavailable, and inaccurate information about the CDE Superfund site compromises the effectiveness of risk communication during the site's \$170 million Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act-funded remediation and may result in increased human health risks from exposure to site contaminants.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We make ten recommendations to the regional administrator for Region 2, including updating and using consistent, clear messaging on the CDE Superfund site's advisory signs and other informational devices; updating the community involvement plan for the site and making it publicly available; accurately documenting the results, outreach activities, and community feedback from the five-year reviews; and updating the site profile page. The Agency agreed with our recommendations, which we consider resolved pending implementation of the agreed-to corrective actions.

Noteworthy Achievements

The EPA site team for the CDE Superfund site demonstrated meaningful engagement with local officials during the ongoing site cleanup phases and maintains an office on the site. Also, the EPA site team listened to the community's concerns and posted signs as an institutional control long before they were required as part of the site remedy.