



# At a Glance

## Evaluation of Trends in Resource Conservation and Recovery Act State-Level Enforcement Data

### Why We Did This Evaluation

#### To accomplish this objective:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Inspector General conducted this evaluation to identify state-level trends in Resource Conservation and Recovery Act enforcement data for large quantity generators from 2020 through 2024. The Act governs the generation, transportation, treatment, storage, and disposal of hazardous waste.

For facilities generating large quantities of hazardous waste, the EPA has established annual inspection expectations, which we call the standard inspection plan. Under this plan, 20 percent of the large quantity generators in each state and territory should be inspected each year, which means that all large quantity generators nationwide should be inspected once every five years. Inspections that identify a violation may result in either informal enforcement actions, such as letters of noncompliance, or formal enforcement actions, such as monetary penalties.

The EPA has authorized 50 states and territories to inspect the large quantity generators in their borders. The EPA serves as the inspecting agency for unauthorized states and territories, and it evaluates the inspection performance of authorized states and territories every five years.

#### To support these EPA mission-related efforts:

- *Compliance with the law.*
- *Partnering with states and other stakeholders.*

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### What We Found

From 2020 through 2024, the EPA and some authorized states did not fully meet their commitment to inspect all large quantity generators, or LQGs, within that five-year period. Our analysis included 53 states and territories.\* Of the states that we reviewed, 38 committed to the standard inspection plan to inspect every LQG within their borders at least once every five years. Thirty states achieved inspection rates at or above 85 percent, which is the highest performance level defined by the EPA: the “meets or exceeds expectations” performance level. Conversely, five states achieved an inspection rate at or between 71 and 84 percent, which falls within the “area for attention” performance level, while three states achieved inspection rates of 70 percent or below, which is the lowest “area for improvement” performance level. Additionally, for at least one year from 2020 through 2024, there were 15 states that followed EPA-approved alternative inspection plans instead of the standard inspection plan. On average, those 15 states inspected 65 percent of their LQGs.

Cumulatively, the EPA and authorized states inspected 5,499, or 81 percent, of the 6,827 LQGs from 2020 through 2024, conducting a total of 8,800 inspections in that time frame. Of these inspections, 4,661 resulted in at least one identified violation. In total, the inspecting agencies identified 23,404 violations and took 5,156 enforcement actions. Of those enforcement actions, 861, or about 17 percent, were formal actions, with 535 of those formal actions including at least one penalty.

There was wide variability in enforcement activities depending on the state, the region, and the lead inspecting agency. For example, although the EPA led just 8 percent of inspections, those inspections resulted in 23 percent of formal enforcement actions and 28 percent of penalties nationally. EPA-led inspections also resulted in higher penalties, with a median value of \$18,750 compared to \$11,999 for state-led inspections.

**Understanding the trends and variabilities in inspections and enforcement behaviors can help the EPA identify areas of concern and determine the effectiveness of its enforcement strategies.**

Our goal for this report is to share information about enforcement trends that may help promote effective oversight. As such, we do not identify the root causes of observed trends, nor do we make any recommendations.

*\* For simplicity, our use of the term state hereafter encompasses states, territories, and the District of Columbia, unless otherwise noted.*

### Noteworthy Achievement

In December 2023, the EPA introduced a “compliance pipeline view” feature to its Enforcement and Compliance History Online [web tool](#). This view lets users see linkages across the enforcement process; improves the transparency of enforcement activities; and allows the EPA, the states, and the public to analyze trends.