



At a Glance

Evaluation of the Status of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act-Funded Brownfield Site Cleanups

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 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grants for cleaning up brownfield sites achieved the Brownfields Program intent of cleaning up and reusing these sites. A brownfield site is defined as property where the redevelopment or reuse may be complicated by the presence of hazardous substances or pollutants.

In 2002, the Brownfields Program was established via statute “to promote the cleanup and reuse of brownfields.” The EPA established five performance measures for the program, including the number of sites cleaned up and the number made ready for anticipated use. In 2009, the EPA awarded \$7.3 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds via the Brownfields Program to clean up 38 brownfield sites in 19 states. The EPA’s application ranking system for these grants considered, among other things, the applicants’ ability to leverage non-EPA funds to complete the cleanups, since cleanup costs usually exceed what the EPA can fund by law. During each grant’s period of performance, which was typically three years, the Agency required recipients to enter their performance measures into an EPA database.

To support these EPA mission-related efforts:

- *Cleaning up and revitalizing land.*
- *Compliance with the law.*

Address inquiries to our public affairs office at (202) 566-2391 or OIG.PublicAffairs@epa.gov.

[List of OIG reports.](#)

What We Found

As of May 2025, of the 38 brownfield sites that received American Recovery and Reinvestment Act cleanup grants in 2009, 29 sites, or 76 percent, had achieved the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act’s statutory intent of both cleanup and reuse of contaminated sites. Nine sites, or 24 percent, had not achieved that statutory intent. Specifically, five sites either were not fully cleaned up or had not submitted the required cleanup documentation to be designated as fully cleaned up, while four sites had been cleaned up but not yet reused. Of the five sites that were not fully cleaned up, three had nevertheless been reused.

The EPA could improve the internal controls that it uses to weigh and rank grant applicants on their ability to complete brownfield site cleanups. For example, even though the EPA gave one applicant a low score for its ability to leverage non-EPA funds to successfully complete the cleanup, that applicant still received a high enough overall score to be selected for a grant. That applicant’s site is one of the nine not achieving the Brownfields Program’s statutory intent. And although the EPA has no legal authority to require that grant recipients submit cleanup documentation or reuse information after grant closeout, it could improve its internal controls over the closeout phase to help mitigate the risk of unsubmitted documentation and incomplete cleanups.

Finally, the Agency’s database that records and tracks the Brownfields Program’s performance measures does not consistently contain complete information about the status of brownfield site cleanups, particularly about redevelopment activities and outcomes. This lack of complete information hampers the program’s efforts to document, assess, and report its accomplishments.

If grant recipients do not clean up and reuse their brownfield sites, the full statutory intent of the Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act will not be met.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We make two recommendations to the assistant administrator for Land and Emergency Management: to review the application ranking system used to select brownfield site cleanup grants and to add standardized questions to the grant closeout checklists that address brownfield site status, entry of Brownfields Program information into the EPA database, and submission of required cleanup documentation. The Agency agreed with these two recommendations, which are resolved with corrective actions pending.