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EPA Superfund Today

Focus on Revisions to Superfund's Risk Assessment Guidance

EPA Moves Ahead on Risk Assessment Reforms

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is revising and updating parts of the *Risk Assessment Guidance for Superfund* (RAGS) relating to:

- *Community Involvement in Superfund Risk Assessments;*
- *Non-residential Land Use Considerations;*
- *Establishing Background for Risk Assessment: and*
- *Probabilistic Risk Assessment.*

This fact sheet highlights the risk assessment project activities, anticipated work products, and schedules for completion. Additional information on RAGS Reforms can be found on EPA's home page in the October 1997 issue of *Superfund Today: Focus on Revisions to Superfund's Risk Assessment Guidance* (*www epa.gov/superfund/tools/today/sft_rags.htm*).

Since the first RAGS Reform Stakeholder Forum in 1996, EPA has received valuable input from a broad spectrum of stakeholders on technical and policy issues related to these reforms. EPA's goal is to complete most of the remaining RAGS Reform work during 1999. More updates will be added later as supporting guidance documents are expanded. Stakeholders can continue to provide input on future drafts by contacting EPA staff directly (see next page for contacts).

Frequently Asked Questions:

Should Risk Assessors Still Use the 1989 RAGS Part A?

Yes. While parts of the RAGS documents (Parts A through C) may be updated, the 1989 RAGS Part A document remains an excellent, concise reference for risk assessment methods and guidance. Risk assessors should also refer to more recent national and regional guidance, as well as state guidance.

What About Ecological Risk Assessment Guidance?

Two of the RAGS Reforms—establishing background for risk assessment and probabilistic risk assessment—address ecological risk assessment issues. Also, EPA's *Ecological Risk Assessment Forum* focuses on Agency-wide advances in ecological risk assessment. To learn more about the advances in ecological risk assessment, please contact a regional EPA risk assessor. Current information is also available on EPA's home page (*www.epa.gov/superfund/programs/ert;* click on "Media Resources").

What Will the New RAGS Documents Look Like?

The work products for each of the four RAGS Reform topics will be issued as fact sheets (as needed), and stand-alone documents.

What Is the Schedule for Completion?

All of the Risk Assessment Reform works-in-progress will be completed as final or review documents in 1999. Some guidance documents will be available sooner than others. The first guidance document and fact sheet on *Community Involvement in Superfund Risk Assessments* will be available in early 1999.

What's New?

Highlights of the RAGS Reform Projects

❖ Community Involvement in Superfund Risk Assessments

The National Contingency Plan requires EPA to involve the community at Superfund sites. However, people have told EPA that they want a more meaningful role in the risk assessment process. This RAGS Reform offers clearer guidance on ways communities can provide input and encourages early involvement in risk assessment when feasible. The guidance materials identify ways to get people involved on a site-by-site basis and emphasizes the need for EPA to clarify how such input will be considered in the risk assessment.

Guidance

This effort will produce two documents that provide ways to better involve citizens in the Superfund risk assessment process. EPA will issue guidance for Superfund site teams as part of RAGS under the title *Community Involvement in Superfund Risk Assessments, A Supplement to RAGS Part A*. In addition, a separate *Superfund Today* fact sheet issued for citizens will explain the role of community involvement in risk assessment. The guidance document provides key questions to ask communities, a summary of "tips" for Superfund teams and citizens, suggested resources, and example cases. These documents will be available early in 1999.

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Risk Assessment Video

To help people understand how they can be involved in risk assessment, EPA is developing a videotape called "*Superfund Risk Assessment: How Communities Can Be Involved.*" The videotape describes the risk assessment process and how people have contributed at Superfund sites around the country. This tool can serve as a starting point for addressing citizens' interest in risk assessment and showing how such interest will affect the cleanup at a Superfund site in their community. The video project will be completed mid-1999.

❖ Non-Residential Land Use Considerations

Future land use is an important factor in evaluating risks associated with Superfund sites. The RAGS Reform project is expanding upon RAGS Part B and the Soil Screening Guidance that address residential exposures to contaminants in soil and groundwater. The new guidance will incorporate a site-specific vapor intrusion model that can be applied at non-residential sites. EPA reviewed regulatory agencies' approaches to addressing non-residential land uses and methods for assessing exposures to people who work near sites. Exposure data for occupational scenarios will be included in an expanded guidance document to supplement EPA's RAGS Part B. The draft guidance will be completed this year.

❖ Establishing Background for Risk Assessment

Superfund teams often are faced with determining background for certain substances in soil and other environmental media. The issues are complex and present a challenge for regulators nationwide. This reform addresses the need for uniform guidance on how to determine background for substances in soil.

The background workgroup developed a preliminary screening-level approach in 1998 that emphasized the importance of adequate site characterization. Further research is under way to review other agencies' approaches to handling background issues in risk assessment and risk management decisions. Using this and other information, the workgroup will develop a technical guidance document for soil background determinations, to be completed as a review draft in September 1999.

❖ Probabilistic Risk Assessment

This Reform addresses the proper application of probabilistic risk analysis in Superfund baseline risk assessments. EPA presented a draft guidance on the use of probabilistic risk analysis in risk assessment, originally called RAGS Part E, to stakeholders at various meetings in 1998. The final guidance document will be published as *RAGS Volume 3*, instead of Part E, as it addresses both human health and ecological risk assessment applications. The guidance will have a companion workbook containing Superfund case studies. Both documents will continue to be developed through the end of 1999. Those interested in probabilistic risk assessment should look for future updates to this guidance that will address parameter distributions and clarify guidance and policy.

More information is available at: **http://www.epa.gov/superfund/tools/today/sft_rags.htm**

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