



# UST Program Facts

## Cleaning Up Releases

### What is the cleanup program?

In Subtitle I of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, Congress directed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to establish regulatory programs that would prevent, detect, and clean up releases from underground storage tank systems (USTs). EPA regulations require UST owners and operators to respond to a release by:

- Reporting a release,
- Removing its source,
- Mitigating fire and safety hazards,
- Investigating the extent of the contamination, and
- Cleaning up soil and groundwater as needed to protect human health and the environment.

EPA developed the UST regulations and program to be flexible and to be implemented by state and local agencies. Every state and many local governments now have active UST cleanup programs.

### How many releases need attention?

As of July 1994, more than 262,000 UST releases had been confirmed. As the graphic on the next page shows, many of these releases have been cleaned up, but much work remains to be done. The number of new releases reported continues to outpace the number of sites cleaned up.

EPA estimates that the total number of confirmed releases could reach 400,000 in the next several years, primarily releases discovered during the closure or replacement of USTs. After this peak, EPA expects fewer releases as USTs comply with requirements.

Currently, state and local UST cleanup program staff oversee an increasing caseload of active cleanups. State staff frequently have 50–400 cases to manage at any given time. Staff work is often further complicated by administrative bottlenecks in oversight processes. At the same time, state staff face an increasing backlog of sites awaiting response.

Increasing caseloads, administrative bottlenecks, backlogged sites, and staff overload slow down cleanup responses. Over time, release sites in the planning stages of corrective action and those awaiting a response gradually become more difficult and costly to clean up. Regulators have difficulty finding the time necessary to perform inspections and review corrective action plans. Delays in the cleanup process disrupt businesses and make cleanups more expensive for many owners, particularly small businesses.

### Can streamlining and alternative technologies help?

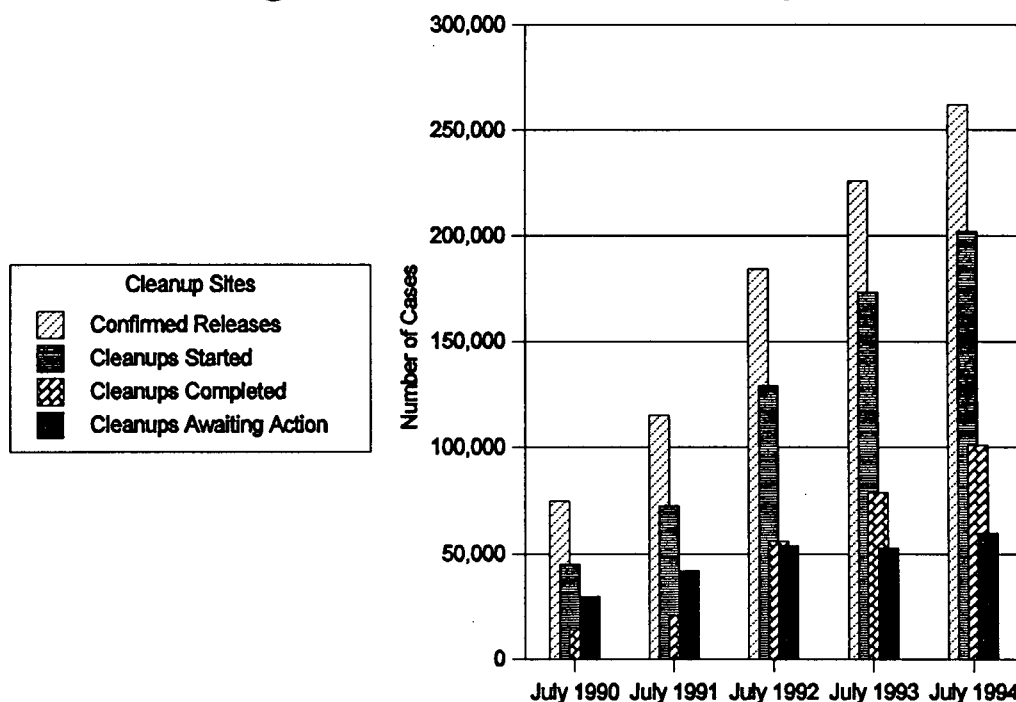
One of EPA's top priorities in the UST program is to help state and local governments make cleanups faster, cheaper, and more effective. Two approaches being used to reach this goal are streamlining administrative procedures and using alternative cleanup technologies.

#### *Streamlining*

EPA staff and consultants help states to streamline cleanup oversight processes:

- They teach Total Quality Management techniques to help identify delays and other opportunities for improvement.
- They show state managers and staff how to use flowcharts and performance indicators to document, analyze, and improve their programs.

# Growing Number Of Cleanup Sites



- They support state managers and staff in streamlining efforts: developing clear guidance materials and hosting "consultants days" to improve the quality of cleanup plans and reports; designing process changes that reduce delays and paperwork; and providing training that enables people to perform more efficiently.

## Alternative Technologies

In cooperative efforts with contractors, consultants, tank owners, and states, EPA is also working to promote the use of alternatives to traditional site assessment and cleanup technologies. Even though some promising technologies—such as air sparging, bioremediation, and low temperature thermal desorption—have proven advantageous in field applications, they are not yet widely used across the country. EPA is using a variety of training, demonstration, and outreach projects to increase the acceptance and use of technologies that can help make cleanups faster, less costly, or more effective.

## Are EPA's efforts helping?

By streamlining cleanup oversight processes and promoting wider use of alternative technologies for site assessment and cleanup, many states have made

improvements. States have reduced delays in permitting, site assessment, corrective action, and reimbursement processes. States are providing clearer guidance to consultants and contractors, which is resulting in better plans and reports, speeding up the work, and cutting paperwork costs. As training and demonstration projects progress, alternative technologies such as soil vapor extraction, air sparging, and bioremediation are being used more often.

*"Cleaning Up Releases" is one in a series of fact sheets about underground storage tanks (USTs) and leaking USTs. The series is designed to help EPA, other federal officials, and state authorities answer the most frequently asked questions about USTs with consistent, accurate information in plain language. Keep the fact sheets handy as a resource. This fact sheet addresses federal regulations. You may need to refer to applicable state or local regulations, as well. For more information on UST publications, call the RCRA/Superfund Hotline at 800 424-9346.*



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