



The Superfund Removal Program

Incidents involving hazardous materials that present an imminent threat to human health or the environment may occur or be discovered in any community at any time. These kinds of incidents may include, but are not limited to:

- Illegal disposal of toxic materials or hazardous waste.
- Improper handling or disposal of hazardous materials at landfills, industrial areas, etc.
- Spills of hazardous materials when a truck or train overturns.
- Discharges of hazardous materials into the air or water during a fire.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Superfund Emergency Response Program was created to respond to situations such as these.

How Can EPA Respond to Releases or Threatened Releases of Hazardous Substances

Under Superfund, EPA may respond to releases or threats of releases of hazardous substances by starting a removal action. A removal action is a short-term action intended to stabilize or clean up an incident or site which poses a threat to human health or the environment. These actions may include:

- removing and disposing of hazardous substances;

In 1980, Congress passed a law called the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). CERCLA created a tax on the chemical and petroleum industries. The money collected from the tax goes to a Trust Fund to clean up abandoned or uncontrolled hazardous waste sites. The money has come to be called the Superfund. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for running the Superfund program.

Under the Superfund program, EPA can:

- Pay for the cleanup of hazardous waste sites when those responsible for such sites cannot be found or are unwilling or unable to clean up a site.
- Take legal action to force those responsible for hazardous waste sites that threaten public health or the environment to clean up or pay for the cleanup of those sites or reimburse EPA for the costs of cleanup.

The law authorizes two kinds of response actions:

- Short-term removal actions where immediate actions may be taken to address releases or

threats of releases requiring expedited response.

- Longer-term remedial actions that stop or substantially reduce releases or threats of releases of hazardous substances that are serious but not immediately life-threatening.

Response actions may include, but are not limited to:

- Removing hazardous materials from the site to an EPA-approved, licensed hazardous waste facility for treatment, containment, or destruction.
- Containing the waste on-site

so that it can safely remain there and present no further problem.

- Destroying or treating the waste on-site through incineration or other innovative technologies.
- Identifying and removing the source of ground water contamination, and halting further spread of the contaminants.

This fact sheet is one of a series prepared by the Superfund Community Relations Program to help citizens understand how the Superfund program works.

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- constructing a fence, posting warning signs, or taking other security precautions necessary to control access of humans or animals to a site;
 - providing a temporary alternate water supply to local residents when their drinking water supplies are contaminated;
 - temporarily relocating area residents.

The 1980 CERCLA law currently limits removal actions to six months in duration and a total cost of \$1 million, although exemptions may be granted if work at a particular site cannot be completed within the six month or \$1 million limitations.

Because the purpose of a removal action is to respond to an imminent threat and is a short-term action, long-term environmental problems like area-wide contamination of ground water cannot generally be addressed. In that event, the On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) will refer the site to EPA's Remedial Response Program for further investigation and assessment.

Remedial actions are longer-term actions that stop or substantially reduce releases or threatened releases of hazardous substances that are serious, but not immediately threatening. Remedial actions are undertaken only at sites on EPA's National Priorities List (NPL), which is EPA's list of hazardous waste sites chosen for possible long-term remedial actions under Superfund. EPA often conducts both removal and remedial actions at NPL sites. Removal actions may be required during a remedial action if an immediate threat is discovered during the course of the remedial work.

How Does the Removal Program Work?

The National Contingency Plan (NCP), the Federal regulation that guides the Superfund program, outlines the roles and responsibilities of each agency involved in responding to releases of hazardous substances. The U.S. Coast Guard has primary responsibility for response to releases in or near the coastal areas of the United States, and EPA has primary responsibility for response inland.

The first step in EPA's removal program is the discovery of a release or threatened release of hazardous substances which presents a threat to public health or the environment. EPA may be notified through the National Response Center (NRC) at the 24-hour telephone number 1-800-424-8802, which is operated by the U.S. Coast Guard, or contacted directly by industries or individuals.

Coast Guard officials at the NRC notify the appropriate government agencies and officials when a release occurs. An EPA official, the OSC, evaluates the situation. Based upon this evaluation, Superfund money may be used to clean up the incident if those responsible for the incident cannot or will not conduct the cleanup, or if State or local officials are unable to respond. Other government agencies may be called upon for assistance when necessary, depending upon the nature and extent of the release.

Who Pays for
Removal Actions?

Most removals are paid for or conducted by those responsible for creating an emergency or the release of hazardous substances. Those responsible may include generators, transporters, or disposers of hazardous waste. The rest may be paid for and conducted by state or county response teams with their own funds, or by EPA, using Superfund money. When Superfund money is used, EPA may take action to compel those responsible to reimburse EPA for the costs of the cleanup.

How Can You
Obtain Information
On Removal Actions?

EPA makes every effort to ensure open, two-way communication with the public. Because EPA is aware of the importance of keeping the public informed of progress and developments at Superfund sites, every EPA Office has a Community Relations Coordinator who may be contacted for information on removal actions and public outreach activities.