



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to determine if the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) allowed appropriate community involvement and provided adequate notice when selecting the East Mission Flats (EMF), Idaho, repository location; and included flood controls in repository design to minimize potential for releasing contaminants.

Background

An environmental organization located in Kellogg, Idaho, complained to the Office of Inspector General (OIG) Hotline that EPA did not follow Superfund requirements in designing the repository. The group alleged the public was not notified appropriately of repository plans and did not have an opportunity to provide comments.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional, Public Affairs and Management at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2009/20090608-09-P-0162.pdf

Contaminated Soil Waste Repository at East Mission Flats, Idaho

What We Found

EPA Region 10 and the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (IDEQ) provided opportunities for the community to become involved and notified the public when selecting the East Mission Flats repository site location and soliciting comments on the proposed plan, location, and designs.

We found that many physical aspects of flooding have been investigated and considered in the design process. However, we also found that the geochemical aspects and potential for releasing dissolved contaminants had yet to be investigated. The proposed repository site is located in an area that floods annually. Region 10 and IDEQ have not sufficiently analyzed the geochemical conditions that are expected to form near the repository base, the potential for annual flooding to introduce water into the repository, and the possibility that dissolved contaminants will migrate away from the repository. In response to our concerns, Region 10 and IDEQ prepared a draft scope of work for the needed analysis. Much of that work was completed and included in Region 10's response to our draft report. But the work leaves unresolved the amount of water that will be introduced into the repository with flooding and rising groundwater levels.

What We Recommend

We recommended that EPA Region 10 finish analyzing the geochemical and physical conditions that may lead to contaminants dissolving near the repository base; then confirm the adequacy of the repository design to prevent dissolved contaminants from being released under these conditions.

Region 10 concurred with the recommendation and prepared a technical analysis. We acknowledge that the new work is extensive, especially the unsaturated zone modeling. However, the Region's analysis included assumptions, with consequent conclusions, that the OIG believes require technical verification. The Region should address these issues in its 90-day response to the final report. The recommendation will remain open.