



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this evaluation to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) tribal solid waste management activities are helping tribes develop the capacity they need to eliminate open dumps.

Background

Illegal dumping of solid waste poses significant health and environmental risks to the members of 564 federally recognized Indian tribes throughout the country. Currently, there are nearly 4,000 reported open dumps located on tribal lands. EPA has been working for over 25 years to help tribes develop the capacity to manage solid waste and enforce against illegal dumping. This work is facilitated through the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance, and the American Indian Environmental Office.

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

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2011/20110321-11-P-0171.pdf

EPA Needs an Agency-Wide Plan to Provide Tribal Solid Waste Management Capacity Assistance

What We Found

EPA cannot determine whether its efforts are assisting tribal governments in developing the capacity to manage solid waste or reduce the risks of open dumps in Indian country. EPA's performance measures do not assess whether the Agency's efforts are effective in building solid waste management capacity in Indian country. EPA also lacks internal data controls to track the status of open dumps.

EPA does not have an Agency-wide plan that defines the roles and responsibilities of the EPA program offices and regions. EPA also lacks internal controls that hold these offices accountable for providing consistent solid waste management assistance to tribes. The lack of a single, Agency-wide plan results in poor coordination and limited oversight, and may lead to an ineffective use of resources. As a result, EPA cannot (1) ensure that consistent solid waste management assistance is provided, (2) accurately determine the risks of open dumps, or (3) determine whether efforts are effective nationwide.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the EPA Deputy Administrator develop an Agency-wide plan to implement consistent and effective tribal solid waste management capacity assistance. We recommend that this single plan outlines the roles and responsibilities of EPA program offices and regions, and identifies the Agency resources required for these activities. The plan should also implement output and outcome measures that track how consistently and effectively EPA activities are provided for tribes. Further, this plan should include (1) internal controls to ensure consistent data collection, (2) a process to ensure coordination between EPA program offices and regions, and (3) a timeline specifying when the activities and outcomes outlined in the plan are expected to be accomplished.

The Agency did not agree with our conclusion or most of the recommendations in the report. The Agency did not agree to develop a national plan to manage and implement tribal solid waste management capacity assistance. EPA did agree to identify resources required for providing solid waste assistance and to improve program office coordination. However, EPA rejected recommendations aimed at improving data collection, outcome measures, and internal management controls. These recommendations will remain unresolved until such time as the Office of Inspector General and EPA can reach agreement on required actions.