

Ohio's Water Quality Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

This audit is one in a series of state water quality audits being conducted by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to develop a national picture of the performance of state water quality programs. Ohio was selected as one of the states for audit because the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recognizes Ohio as a national leader in the development and use of biological criteria in its water quality program.

OBJECTIVES

Our overall objective was to determine whether the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency's (OEPA) water quality program effectively protected its surface waters to sustain human health and aquatic life, and provided for both recreational and economic activities. Our specific objectives were to answer the following questions:

- Has OEPA implemented procedures to develop water quality standards that will protect the Ohio's water quality?
 - Has OEPA implemented procedures to test and assess the quality of all appropriate waters Ohio?
 - Are OEPA's reports on water quality complete, accurate, and useful for program management?
 - Has Region 5 implemented effective procedures to approve Ohio water quality standards and evaluate OEPA's water quality standards setting, testing, assessing, and reporting?
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RESULTS IN BRIEF

OEPA developed water quality standards which will protect its surface waters to sustain human health and aquatic life, and provide for recreational and economic activities. Ohio is one of only two States that include numeric biological criteria in its water quality standards. The inclusion of biological criteria into Ohio's water quality program has resulted in OEPA gaining recognition as the national leader in the development and use of biological criteria. We found one significant water quality standard that OEPA needed to update. OEPA was not using the most current EPA recommended criteria to protect recreational uses of its water bodies.

OEPA also implemented adequate procedures to test and assess the quality of its waters. The use of biological surveys makes OEPA's assessments more accurate than other States'. Biological surveys are valuable to a water quality program because they can often detect effects of pollutants that otherwise would not be identified with chemical tests alone. For example, OEPA found in 1995 that 50 percent of Ohio water bodies assessed with chemical tests alone and identified as not impaired, were actually impaired after biological surveys were conducted.

OEPA's water quality reports were complete, accurate, and useful for program management.

Region 5 generally implemented effective procedures to approve Ohio water quality standards and evaluate the OEPA's water quality standards setting, testing, assessing, and reporting, with one exception. Region 5 should have required OEPA to submit a Quality Management Plan that the Region needed to evaluate OEPA's monitoring plan.

REGION 5 COMMENTS AND OIG EVALUATION

Region 5 agreed that OEPA needs to use the most current EPA recommended criteria to measure pathogens in its recreational surface waters. Region 5 initiated discussions with OEPA to ensure that OEPA uses the more detective E. coli and Enterococci criteria when assessing Ohio's recreational surface waters.

Region 5 also agreed that OEPA needs to submit a Quality Management Plan and stated that corrective actions have already been implemented. In May 1999, OEPA submitted a draft Quality Management Plan to the Region, and is expected to submit a final Quality Management Plan this summer.

The corrective actions initiated by Region 5 initiated, along with OEPA's follow-up actions, when completed, will adequately address the issues identified in this report.