

MISSISSIPPI'S WATER QUALITY STANDARDS, MONITORING AND REPORTING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Clean and safe water, capable of sustaining human health and aquatic life, is one of EPA's ten strategic goals. Under requirements of the Clean Water Act, EPA and states have developed water quality programs. The principal goals of the Act and State water quality programs are to: (i) restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of State waters; (ii) achieve water quality that promotes the protection of fish, shellfish, wildlife, and recreation; and (iii) consider the use and value of state waters for public water supplies, propagation of fish and wildlife, recreation, agriculture and industrial/navigational purposes. State programs include the establishment of water quality standards, identifying the current planned uses of surface waters, and monitoring the quality of state waters in relation to their intended uses. EPA and states use information from these water quality programs to measure the effectiveness of other water programs in controlling and reducing water pollution.

This audit is one in a series of state water quality audits conducted by the OIG to develop a national assessment of state water quality programs.

OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the audit was to determine whether Mississippi's water quality program met the principal goals of the Clean Water Act. Specific objectives were to determine if:

- The state had adequate procedures to establish water quality standards that will protect the state's water quality;
 - The state had an adequate process to test and assess the quality of all appropriate waters in the state;
 - State reports on water quality were complete, accurate and useful to program management; and
 - Region 4 had implemented effective procedures to approve state water quality standards and evaluate the state's water quality standards setting, testing, assessing and reporting.
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RESULTS IN BRIEF

Mississippi's current water quality standards and monitoring processes provide basic protection of the State's waters. Establishing protective standards and providing a fundamental monitoring program has taken many years for the State and EPA to complete. Even so, some standards and related procedures adopted by the State still do not provide protection of the State's waters as stipulated in EPA guidance. The State's water quality monitoring program was very limited prior to 1997. Increased State funding has resulted in dramatic improvements in the State's water quality monitoring. However, at the time of our review, a few additional improvements would have made the State's monitoring program more effective. Completion and submission of water quality reports also needs improvement. While Mississippi's water quality reports are generally accurate, Mississippi has been consistently late, up to two years in some cases, in completing water quality reports as

required by the Clean Water Act and EPA regulations. These reports serve as a guide for planning and managing the State's water quality program. Late reports reduce the effectiveness of these reports as a management tool. Finally, Region 4 took almost five years to review and approve water quality standards initially adopted by the State in February 1994. Region 4 has not provided the oversight and technical assistance needed to timely resolve problems with the State's standards that have existed for 10 years or more.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend the Regional Administrator:

- Assist Mississippi in completing the use attainability analysis ¹ (UAA) for the Escatawpa River as currently scheduled. Request that Mississippi update its water and quality standard for pentachlorophenol and adopt adequate antidegradation implementation procedures that fully support the intent of the Clean Water Act.
 - Assist Mississippi in developing a long-term monitoring strategy and management plan to incorporate more advance monitoring techniques and ensure that the State comprehensively monitors the quality of its waters.
 - Request that Mississippi place more priority on timely completion of required water quality reports. Assist State in establishing a process for properly scheduling and preparing water quality reports so that future reports are submitted to EPA on the required dates.
 - Develop procedures that ensure a timely review and approval/disapproval of Mississippi's water quality standards and related policies. Provide more aggressive oversight and technical assistance to ensure that problems with water quality standards and policies are timely resolved.
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AGENCY AND STATE COMMENTS AND OIG EVALUATION

Region 4 generally agreed with the findings and recommendations in the draft report and provided completed and planned actions in response to the recommendations. However, the Region did request changes to certain statements in the report. The State of Mississippi did not provide a formal response but did provide editorial comments related to the draft report findings and recommendations. Changes were made in the final report as deemed appropriate.

Portions of the Region's response were incorporated into appropriate chapters of the report. Region 4's response is included in its entirety in Appendix I.

¹Use attainability analysis is a structured scientific assessment of the factors affecting the attainment of the designated use for a waterbody which may include physical, chemical, biological, and economic factors.