



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted a review of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) drinking water program at the request of its Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water (OGWDW) to:

- Summarize findings and recommendations from recent drinking water program-related evaluation reports by the EPA Office of Inspector General (OIG) and others, and determine whether EPA has initiated actions in response;
- Track significant program developments; and
- Identify challenges to help focus future evaluation efforts.

Background

OGWDW, along with EPA's 10 regional drinking water programs, oversees implementation of the Safe Drinking Water Act for the Nation's 156,000 public water systems. OGWDW is primarily responsible for setting and enforcing drinking water regulations and assisting and overseeing State programs.

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

To view the full report, click on the following link:

www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2008/20080331-08-P-0120.pdf

Summary of Recent Developments in EPA's Drinking Water Program and Areas for Additional Focus

What We Found

OGWDW addressed or is addressing all of the EPA OIG drinking water program-related evaluation report recommendations made from September 2003 to May 2007. OGWDW also took action on prior report suggestions.

Many parts of EPA's drinking water program experienced significant developments since 2003. These included:

- Rule developments or revisions
- Performance measure development
- Drinking water security
- Source water protection
- Capacity development
- Sustainable infrastructure
- Underground injection control
- Logic model development
- State oversight
- Analytical methods development

We also noted a number of Agency actions related to recommendations in U.S. Government Accountability Office and other evaluation reports.

Still, the drinking water program faces challenges, notably limited resources, emerging contaminants and new regulations, and system security issues. We suggest future evaluations for several areas of the drinking water program. These reviews should allow EPA to determine how well its programs are working and help it direct resources toward its most pressing needs. Priority should be given to: water security-response capability, chemical security at drinking water facilities, variances/exemptions and waivers, effectiveness of Agency funding, and the contaminant selection process. Other areas meriting review include: inter-program linkages, Underground Injection Control-Class V wells, transient and non-transient non-community water systems, and the recent modernization of the Safe Drinking Water Information System. Although we are making these suggestions for focus, we make no recommendations in this report.

In its response, EPA agreed with our assessment.