




UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

November 6, 2009

OFFICE OF
SOLID WASTE AND EMERGENCY
RESPONSE

MEMORANDUM

Subject: 25 Years of the Underground Storage Tanks Program
Protecting Our Land And Water

From: Carolyn Hoskinson, Director 
Office of Underground Storage Tanks

To: EPA Regional UST/LUST Programs
State/Territorial/Tribal UST/LUST Programs
UST Stakeholders

November 8, 2009 marks 25 years since Congress created the national underground storage tanks (UST) program by adding Subtitle I to the Solid Waste Disposal Act. I am pleased to observe this important milestone of the national underground storage tanks program by sharing with you some of the program's accomplishments.

Because of the joint efforts of EPA, states, territories, tribes, communities, and industry, America's land and groundwater are better protected from underground storage tank releases. Over the past 25 years, these partners displayed dedication to the tanks program, enthusiasm in addressing the enormous task of preventing and cleaning up tank leaks, and collaboration in working toward our common goal of protecting our land and groundwater.

Over the past quarter century, EPA and our partners closed over 1.7 million substandard tanks that, if corroded, would have leaked petroleum or other chemicals into the nation's environment; cleaned up more than 388,000 petroleum leaks, approximately 80 percent of all reported releases; and reduced the number of new releases from a high of almost 67,000 in 1990 to under 7,200 in 2009. Today, tank systems are much less likely to leak and cause significant environmental problems. More than anything else, this quarter century milestone is a testament to the successes that can be achieved when diverse partners come together to achieve a common goal.

But as we pause to celebrate, let's not lose sight of the many challenges still remaining for the national tanks program. All remaining 611,500 active, federally-regulated tanks must be inspected every three years. All tank operators must be trained in accordance with newly-established standards. The backlog of just over 100,000 releases remaining to be cleaned up needs to be addressed. We must ensure in an accountable and transparent manner that the

\$200 million Recovery Act money to assess and clean up petroleum underground storage tank leaks is used to expeditiously clean up releases, create jobs, and stimulate the economy. We will continue to develop strategies to promote cleaning up and reusing the hundreds of thousands of abandoned gas stations (petroleum brownfields) all across the country.

In addition to the program challenges above, we will continue to be presented with unplanned challenges that the UST program will need to address. Recent examples include: responding to issues associated with alternative fuels and diesel exhaust fluid and continuing to increase our awareness about ethylene dibromide and vapor intrusion.

I close with my appreciation for the cooperation, support, and efforts of the diligent and talented staff in EPA headquarters and regions; state, territorial, and tribal tank programs; and across the regulated community who have played an important part in the tank program's achievements over the past 25 years. Thank you to all of our partners, and I look forward to our ongoing successes.