



U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

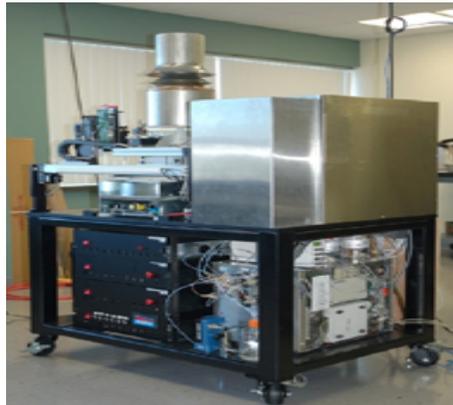
Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Evaluation Report

EPA's BioWatch Role Reduced

Report No. 10-P-0106

April 20, 2010



Report Contributors:

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Denton Stafford
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Abbreviations

DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
OAR	Office of Air and Radiation
OIG	Office of Inspector General

Cover photos: BioWatch 3 detectors being tested and researchers collecting data during a study on airflow in Boston's subway system. (Photos courtesy U.S. Department of Homeland Security)



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We performed this review to follow up on the Office of Inspector General's (OIG's) 2005 report titled *EPA Needs to Fulfill Its Designated Responsibilities to Ensure Effective BioWatch Program*. In 2005, the OIG found that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) did not provide adequate oversight of BioWatch sampling operations and did not ensure quality assurance guidance was followed.

Background

BioWatch was created by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to detect biological agents in select cities. Introduced in early 2003, BioWatch is part of an evolving, nationwide biosurveillance system that looks for early indicators of the exposure of people, animals, and plants to biological agents. Initially, EPA maintained the sampling portion of the BioWatch program, in part because of the Agency's experience in air monitoring.

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

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2010/20100420-10-P-0106.pdf

EPA's BioWatch Role Reduced

What We Found

EPA's role has been significantly reduced from that at the time of our 2005 review. DHS has assumed control of the major components of BioWatch for which EPA was initially responsible. These activities include the sampling portion of the program and the issuance of grants to State and local air monitoring agencies to conduct daily monitoring activities. Further, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local public health labs are now responsible for filter collection and analysis. As of January 2010, EPA was providing technical assistance relating to emergency response and was responsible for updating post detection sampling plans requested by jurisdictions. For the 1-year period January 2009 to January 2010, EPA received \$780,000 from DHS for its BioWatch activities. In Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005, EPA received \$26.8 million from DHS.

When the BioWatch program was first introduced in 2003, the designated responsibilities of EPA's Office of Air and Radiation constituted a crucial part of the BioWatch program – the sampling operations. These operations included monitor deployment, site security, oversight, and assessment of monitor technology. In the OIG's 2005 report, we found that EPA did not provide adequate oversight of the sampling operations to ensure quality assurance guidance was adhered to, potentially affecting the quality of the samples.

Because EPA's role in the BioWatch Program has been reduced, follow-up on implemented corrective actions agreed to for the previous OIG report is no longer required. We concluded that EPA did not need to take further action in response to our 2005 report.

This report makes no recommendations. As a result, no further action is required by EPA. The Agency did not have formal comments on the draft report.



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

OFFICE OF
INSPECTOR GENERAL

April 20, 2010

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: EPA's BioWatch Role Reduced
Report No. 10-P-0106

Wade T. Najjum

FROM: Wade T. Najjum
Assistant Inspector General for Program Evaluation

TO: Mathy Stanislaus
Assistant Administrator for Solid Waste and Emergency Response

This is our report on the subject evaluation conducted by the Office of Inspector General of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. This report does not contain findings and recommendations.

The estimated cost of this report – calculated by multiplying the project's staff days by the applicable daily full cost billing rates in effect at the time – is \$158,446.

Action Required

Because this report contains no recommendations, you are not required to respond to this report. We have no objections to the further release of this report to the public. This report will be available at <http://www.epa.gov/oig>.

If you or your staff have any questions regarding this report, please contact me at 202-566-0827 or najjum.wade@epa.gov, or Jeffrey Harris at 202-566-0831 or harris.jeffrey@epa.gov.

Purpose

The purpose of this review was to evaluate the status of corrective actions taken by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in response to an Office of Inspector General (OIG) report issued in 2005.¹ Specifically, we sought to determine EPA's current role in the BioWatch program and whether the recommendations from the OIG 2005 report are still applicable.

Background

EPA, in concert with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the U.S. Department of Energy, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, deployed an air sampling system during the period late January to mid-April 2003, for which preexisting monitoring stations across the United States were selected. This system is part of the BioWatch program, which is designed to provide early detection of releases of select biological agents in the air through a comprehensive protocol of monitoring and laboratory analysis. BioWatch is funded by DHS.

Initially, EPA maintained the sampling portion of the BioWatch program because of the Agency's experience in air monitoring and ability to provide grants to State and local air monitoring agencies conducting daily monitoring activities. EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards in the Office of Air and Radiation (OAR) coordinated the air sampling component. This sampling component involved aerosol monitors mounted on preexisting EPA air quality stations to detect biological pathogens that might be intentionally released by terrorists. The aerosol monitors contained filters that were manually collected at 24-hour intervals, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Noteworthy Achievements

EPA has collaborated successfully with DHS on BioWatch and provided DHS with the expertise to take over the complete program. According to staff from OAR's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards, the original intent of EPA's involvement in BioWatch was to shift its responsibilities to DHS when it had the capability and capacity to manage the program.

Scope and Methodology

We conducted this evaluation in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the evaluation to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our objectives. We performed our follow-up evaluation from October 2009 through March 2010.

We reviewed the status of the implementation of recommendations from our previously issued report. To complete our review, we met with staff from EPA's Office of Emergency

¹ EPA OIG, *EPA Needs to Fulfill Its Designated Responsibilities to Ensure Effective BioWatch Program*, Report No. 2005-P-00012, March 23, 2005.

Management and OAR and analyzed support documents to determine the status of implementation of the report's recommendations. We also spoke with Office of Inspector General representatives from DHS and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. We reviewed EPA's Audit Management Process 2750 CHG 2 and discussed the report's final action data with the audit follow-up coordinator.

Prior Audit Coverage

The OIG initiated a review in 2004 to determine how well EPA was carrying out activities related to its role in the BioWatch program. During that review, we sought to determine:

- What were EPA's designated responsibilities in the BioWatch program?
- How well was EPA implementing its designated responsibilities in the BioWatch program?

Our 2005 report found that EPA should ensure that it fulfilled all of the BioWatch-designated responsibilities. We found that EPA did not provide adequate oversight of the sampling operations and did not ensure quality assurance guidance was followed. EPA's lack of oversight and quality assurance for the BioWatch program raised concerns about the capability of the program. We recommended that EPA ensure that it fulfill all of its BioWatch-designated responsibilities, including ensuring that quality assurance guidance is adhered to.

Results

We found that EPA's role in the BioWatch program has been significantly reduced since 2003. As a result, corrective actions agreed to for the previous OIG report are no longer required. DHS has assumed control of the major components of BioWatch for which EPA was initially responsible. These activities include the sampling portion of the program and the issuance of grants to State and local air monitoring agencies to conduct daily monitoring activities.

As of January 2010, EPA's BioWatch responsibilities were limited to providing consultation for the development of consequence management plans for local jurisdictions upon request. In addition, an OAR staff member had an advisory role in BioWatch relating to investigating and testing of new technologies. Funding for these activities is provided via an interagency agreement with DHS. For the 1-year period January 2009 to January 2010, EPA received \$780,000 from DHS for its BioWatch activities. This is a significant reduction from the \$26.8 million DHS provided EPA for Fiscal Years 2004 and 2005. We concluded that EPA's limited involvement in the BioWatch program eliminated the need to evaluate the status of corrective actions taken in response to our 2005 report.

Status of Recommendations and Potential Monetary Benefits

RECOMMENDATIONS						POTENTIAL MONETARY BENEFITS (in \$000s)	
Rec. No.	Page No.	Subject	Status ¹	Action Official	Planned Completion Date	Claimed Amount	Agreed To Amount
No recommendations							

¹ O = recommendation is open with agreed-to corrective actions pending
 C = recommendation is closed with all agreed-to actions completed
 U = recommendation is undecided with resolution efforts in progress

Appendix A

Distribution

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