



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

The National Oil and Hazardous Substances Pollution Contingency Plan (NCP) establishes federal roles for oil spill response and requires area and regional planning by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other stakeholders. A prior audit on the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico noted that some contingency plans were out of date. We initiated this review to determine whether the contingency planning structure for responding to oil spills and hazardous substance releases is effective, and whether plans are updated to reflect lessons learned from recent major events and new developments or industry trends.

This report addresses the following EPA Goal or Cross-Cutting Strategy

- *Cleaning up communities and advancing sustainable development*

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

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2013/20130215-13-P-0152.pdf

EPA Could Improve Contingency Planning for Oil and Hazardous Substance Response

What We Found

EPA regions have expanded contingency planning by creating additional plans and materials, but regions cannot maintain this large volume of information with their limited resources. Regions have created subarea contingency plans, geographic response plans and strategies, and various web-based tools. This structure exceeds the three levels of plans established in the Oil Pollution Act, which revised the NCP to expand the response system. The NCP requires national planning in the form of an NCP, regional planning by each Regional Response Team in the form of Regional Contingency Plans, and area planning by Area Committees in the form of Area Contingency Plans. Regions developed additional plan materials because regional On-Scene Coordinators find them necessary to respond to incidents. Some written plans miss some NCP requirements, contain duplicative information, and are out-of-date. Technological methods—instead of revising written plans—would enable EPA to maintain current information needed to efficiently respond to spills.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Solid Waste and Emergency Response (1) issue guidance to regions on working with their Regional Response Teams and Area Committees to use the most efficient method available to address NCP requirements, (2) require regions to keep critical planning information up-to-date and avoid unnecessary duplication, (3) work through the office's National Response Team capacity to develop a process to regularly incorporate lessons learned from national exercises into contingency plan reviews and updates, and (4) assess the resources necessary to develop and maintain contingency plans and use the results to develop a workforce plan to distribute contingency planning resources. The Agency agreed with our recommendations and plans to address them by the end of fiscal year 2013.

Noteworthy Achievements

EPA regions apply an inclusive approach toward contingency planning by working closely with other federal agencies, states, tribes, and industry representatives. Regions also use technological methods—such as Geographic Information Systems maps, web-based lists, and electronic tools—to address some NCP requirements.