



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Inspector General received an anonymous hotline complaint about the EPA's management of debris at the Adair Grain Inc. Fertilizer Plant explosion site in West, Texas, known as the West Fertilizer explosion.

On April 17, 2013, an anhydrous ammonia explosion occurred at the plant, killing 14 people and injuring about 200. Local, state and federal law enforcement and response personnel responded. EPA Region 6 staff provided oversight of a responsible party removal action to address immediate threats from ammonium nitrate and anhydrous ammonia. Removal began April 17, 2013, and was completed May 3, 2013. Other removal activities were performed by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) with oversight by EPA Region 6.

This report addresses the following EPA theme:

- *Taking action on toxics and chemical safety.*

For further information, contact our public affairs office at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2014/20140224-14-P-0123.pdf

Complaints Regarding Debris Management at the West, Texas, Fertilizer Plant Explosion Have Been Addressed

What We Found

The hotline complaint alleged that debris was removed from the West Fertilizer explosion site and "dumped" onto two private properties across the road into two "enormous" piles and was possibly hazardous. We substantiated that there were two debris piles, but they were not found to be hazardous. EPA and TCEQ staff stated the debris was moved onto the two properties without their knowledge by another federal agency.

Debris from a fertilizer plant explosion was moved without EPA or TCEQ knowledge but is being managed. A water main break existed under the debris but has been addressed. The debris was found to be non-hazardous.

The hotline complaint also alleged that there was a leaking water main below the two debris piles, which could have been contaminated from seepage from the two piles. We substantiated this allegation. However, according to the Cottonwood Water Supply, which manages the water supply to the properties, the water main was disconnected after the explosion. We identified one issue associated with this allegation—the EPA Region 6 report of its response oversight activities at the West Fertilizer plant explosion incorrectly stated that the water main was managed by the city of West rather than Cottonwood Water Supply. In response to our concern, Region 6 corrected its report.

Further, the hotline complaint alleged that there are no immediate plans by the EPA or TCEQ to address the two debris piles. We did not substantiate this allegation. TCEQ informed us that the sites were fenced off and that most debris has been disposed or recycled.

Since EPA Region 6 staff have addressed the one concern we identified, regarding reference to the correct water supply company in the response oversight report, we make no recommendations.