



# At a Glance

## Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to determine how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has addressed the sites in its August 2012 Lead Smelter Strategy. The 2012 Strategy focuses on 464 historical lead smelter sites identified in 2001, also known as "Eckel sites." We also examined the actions the EPA has taken to inform communities near the Eckel sites of potential lead contamination.

The Eckel sites are located across the country, primarily in urban areas. The EPA's Superfund site assessment process, used to assess sites like the Eckel sites, was designed to evaluate potential hazardous waste sites that may pose a threat to human health and the environment and to determine if a site may warrant cleanup attention. The EPA developed its 2012 Lead Smelter Strategy to ensure that all Eckel sites would be assessed.

**This report addresses the following EPA goal or cross-agency strategy:**

- *Cleaning up communities and advancing sustainable development.*

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

**The full report is at:**  
[www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2014/20140617-14-P-0302.pdf](http://www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2014/20140617-14-P-0302.pdf)

## ***EPA Has Made Progress in Assessing Historical Lead Smelter Sites But Needs to Strengthen Procedures***

### What We Found

It took the EPA more than 12 years to complete the preliminary site assessment work at the 464 Eckel sites. According to the Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response, when the EPA learned of the Eckel sites in 2001, it distributed the list to regional offices for informational purposes only. Because the Eckel sites were not submitted to the EPA through the public petition process, there were no acceptance criteria or time limits for screening and assessment of the sites. The EPA's ability to work on the Eckel sites was also impacted by an existing backlog of over 2,200 potentially contaminated sites. As a result, the EPA's regional efforts to assess the Eckel sites were inconsistent. The overall absence of a process for the Eckel sites and other non-petitioned sites, as well as a lack of initial direction from the EPA, led to the inefficient use of agency resources.

**Improvements in guidance and procedures for managing contaminated sites could result in more efficient and effective use of limited resources and result in public health and economic benefits.**

In addition, we found that the EPA lacked sufficient tracking, transparency and guidance on technical aspects of addressing the Eckel sites. Further, the EPA did not effectively convey to the public the details concerning its lengthy efforts and the challenges it faced in addressing the Eckel sites. Although the EPA has made progress in addressing the Eckel sites, the EPA's breakdown in applying standard, transparent criteria and guidance for assessing the sites resulted in inefficiencies in the site assessment process and impacted the EPA's credibility regarding its management of the Eckel sites. Specifically, improvements in guidance and procedures for managing contaminated sites could result in more efficient and effective use of limited resources, as well as have public health and economic benefits.

### Recommendations and Corrective Actions

We recommend that the EPA establish a clear process for handling potentially contaminated sites not referred to the EPA by a public petition, and that the EPA re-evaluate guidance to ensure that regions are able to efficiently spend resources addressing the highest priority sites. To increase transparency and public awareness of the EPA's efforts, we recommend the publication of the EPA's 2012 strategy document and any subsequent findings. The EPA agreed with our recommendations and provided acceptable corrective actions. The recommendations are resolved with corrective actions underway.