



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

This report updates our Fiscal Year 2009 management challenge on how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) uses threat and risk information in decisionmaking. We researched the need for a national environmental policy to leverage resources for environmental protection across government and stakeholder groups.

Background

Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act and created EPA in 1970 to carry out national policy. EPA's success in protecting the environment depends on the efforts of other federal agencies and States. In some cases, EPA partners with other entities to accomplish environmental goals and, in other cases, stakeholders have more authority than EPA over activities that impact environmental quality.

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/2010/20100608-10-P-0140.pdf

National Environmental Policy and Quadrennial Review Needed

What We Found

The environmental protection structure created by the National Environmental Policy Act 40 years ago has not resulted in a comprehensive approach. In addition, new, complex environmental problems such as global climate change, regional water scarcity, and long-range transport of pollutants in air or water require more concerted, coordinated efforts.

EPA shares responsibility for environmental protection with States and 25 federal agencies, resulting in a fragmented approach to environmental protection. For example, EPA and the U.S. Department of Energy both issued ENERGY STAR criteria documents for the same products, which could cause confusion in the marketplace.

EPA lacks authority over many activities that impact the nation's environment. For example, housing financed, controlled, underwritten, or owned by four other federal government entities represents a significant number of homes that could be built radon resistant. The U.S. Department of Agriculture could use its extensive field experience with local farming communities to further contribute to EPA's Chesapeake Bay clean-up efforts.

Past and current Agency efforts, such as the *Proposed Environmental Goals for America with Milestones for 2005* (1995), did not set national policy or clearly align the environmental protection efforts of all federal and State stakeholders. The *National Strategy for Homeland Security* and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Quadrennial Homeland Security Review are an example of a nationwide framework to solve a large, complex problem. Australia and Japan offer international examples of how to incorporate a national policy approach into environmental protection legislation and activities.

EPA should work with Congress and the Administration to examine ways to leverage resources expended to various, insular environmental protection efforts. The Administration should propose to Congress that it create expert panels to consider formulating a national environmental policy and subsequent quadrennial review. Congress could also consider passing legislation recommended by these panels to harmonize various efforts and, where appropriate, to maintain existing requirements in environmental statutes. These efforts could help address the Administrator's priority to expand the conversation on environmentalism and build strong State and tribal partnerships.