



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) is testing long-term monitoring results at Superfund sites the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has deleted from the National Priorities List. Wheeler Pit, located near Janesville, Wisconsin, is one of eight sites being reviewed. In May 2008, the OIG obtained Site ground water samples and a sample from a nearby residential well and conducted a site inspection.

Background

Wheeler Pit received paint sludge and coal ash from an automobile assembly plant. Site wastes were consolidated and capped. The Site was added to the National Priorities List in 1984 and deleted in 2004 when EPA determined that clean-up goals had been achieved.

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/2010/20100908-10-P-0218.pdf

Independent Ground Water Sampling Generally Confirms EPA's Data at Wheeler Pit Superfund Site in Wisconsin

What We Found

With minimal exceptions, our independent sampling results at the Wheeler Pit Superfund Site were consistent with the sampling results that EPA Region 5 has obtained historically. Among 135 contaminants that OIG compared, 8 were different from the region's results for some wells. The differences found among the eight contaminants do not have adverse implications for Site protectiveness, because there are either no applicable standards or the levels of the contaminants were below applicable standards. Our site inspection showed the Site was properly maintained and secured.

Our analysis of site data identified three contaminants – di(2-ethylhexyl) phthalate (DEHP), nickel, and nitrate – that exceeded safe drinking water standards in some wells. Because the OIG found excess levels of DEHP and nitrate in one residential well, OIG notified the resident in coordination with Region 5. Site records support Region 5's assertions that exceedances of nickel and nitrate do not have adverse implications for Site protectiveness, because these contaminants either do not originate from the Site or are contained by the Site remedy.

In addition to the OIG's detection of DEHP in one residential well, DEHP has a history of detection below the limit in some of the Site's ground water monitoring wells. The responsible party's contractor at Wheeler Pit has asserted that the presence of DEHP is due to sampling or laboratory contamination and the region has consistently accepted the explanation, but there is no documentation to support that DEHP is not site related. Therefore, it is unclear whether excess levels of DEHP found in one residential well have implications for Site protectiveness.

What We Recommend

We recommend that EPA Region 5 conduct additional sampling on the residential well with excess DEHP to verify the Region's assertion that DEHP is originating from the sampling process. Region 5 reviewed our draft report, concurred with our findings and recommendation, and proposed an acceptable corrective action.