



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this evaluation to assess the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) oversight and assistance of tribal community water systems (CWSs), and to independently evaluate water quality at selected drinking water systems.

Background

EPA, rather than the States, has the responsibility for protecting human health and the environment on tribal lands. Approximately 600 tribal CWSs serve an estimated 622,000 people. EPA staff members provide these systems with technical and other assistance so that tribal CWSs maintain compliance with Safe Drinking Water Act requirements.

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

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2008/20080916-08-P-0266.pdf

EPA Assisting Tribal Water Systems but Needs to Improve Oversight

What We Found

Tribal drinking water sample results in EPA files indicate that drinking water supplies consistently met regulatory requirements. Regional EPA staff also made correct compliance decisions with sample results that tribal CWSs provided. However, internal control deficiencies existed in administering EPA's oversight of tribal CWSs in two of the five regions we reviewed. To varying degrees, tribal drinking water records in four of the five regions were incomplete due to a failure to maintain oversight of system operations and/or poor records management.

We sought to verify, through independently collected samples, that these tribal CWSs did not exceed drinking water regulatory limits. Of the approximately 2,300 independent samples analyzed, only 7 were above the limits. In those cases, we informed regional staff and water system operators, who then took follow-up actions.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Water (1) establish national and regional tribal drinking water program Standard Operating Procedures in coordination with regional offices; (2) require Region 2 to submit a plan that corrects deficiencies in how it currently implements its tribal drinking water program, including those identified in this report; and (3) direct regions to issue monitoring and reporting violations, take appropriate enforcement actions against tribal CWSs with health-based violations or who fail to monitor or submit monitoring reports, and enter violations into the Safe Drinking Water Information System.

The Agency agreed with our recommendations.