

PRESS STATEMENT



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
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Statement of Nikki L. Tinsley, Inspector General, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on the Office of Inspector General (OIG) report, "EPA's Response to the World Trade Center Collapse: Challenges, Successes, and Areas for Improvement" an evaluation of how EPA reacted to the September 11, 2001, collapse of the World Trade Center towers in New York City.

"This report, initiated by the OIG early in 2002, found that EPA staff did a commendable job reacting to the unprecedented disaster. Nonetheless, many problems were encountered and changes should be made so that EPA can better respond to future disasters.

Our evaluation was performed by a dedicated team that interviewed more than one hundred people, including key officials, air quality experts, rescue and demolition workers, and residents. The team also reviewed extensive documentation, to get a clear picture of how EPA responded to the World Trade Center collapse and how it can better respond to disasters in the future.

While EPA has already initiated actions as a result of its own internal lessons learned exercises, our report offers further recommendations that should result in improved contingency planning, risk assessment and characterization, and risk communication. A primary finding in our evaluation is that EPA needs to be prepared to assert its opinion and judgment on matters that impact human health and the environment, regardless of who else is involved or may share responsibility. Ultimately, the public, Congress, and others expect EPA to monitor and resolve environmental issues.

Evidence gathered through government hearings, news reports, public polls, health studies, and our own interviews indicated that the public did not receive sufficient air quality information and wanted more information on health risks. Because of those concerns, the Office of Inspector General conducted a survey of approximately 10,000 New York City residents regarding government communications, and the effectiveness in informing the public. The results of the survey are being evaluated and will be issued as a separate report.

In this report we state that while EPA's actions to address health risks from indoor air pollutants in the World Trade Center area were consistent with applicable statutes and regulations, EPA could have taken a more proactive approach. Although statutes and regulations allowed for local agencies to lead the

response, and New York City initially took that lead, the City's actions were criticized.

The OIG acknowledges the hard work and effort of EPA employees as well as those from all levels of government in responding to this tragedy. Our report notes areas where things could have been done better, but it in no way diminishes the efforts of those involved.

Unfortunately, our country lives under the threat of future terrorist attacks, and it is important that we use what we have learned from the World Trade Center tragedy to make improvements to our emergency response capabilities. It is our hope that this report will inform that discussion and help EPA in its efforts to improve its ability to respond to large scale emergencies."

EPA Response to the World Trade Center Collapse
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