



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

In June 2014, Region 4 of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) moved residents from three homes near the CTS of Asheville Superfund site in North Carolina because of unsafe levels of the harmful chemical trichloroethylene (TCE) in the air of their homes. We evaluated whether the region met monitoring and communication requirements, had a schedule for cleanup, and implemented efficiencies to quicken the pace of cleanup.

The EPA placed the site on the Superfund National Priorities List effective April 2012, and oversees the cleanup. The EPA spent about \$11.2 million from 1999 through 2015 conducting studies and cleanup actions. Some or all of those costs may be recovered. The EPA Office of Inspector General has issued three prior reports on EPA actions at the site; this report focuses on actions since January 2012.

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

- *Cleaning up communities and advancing sustainable development.*

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Progress Made, but Improvements Needed at CTS of Asheville Superfund Site in North Carolina to Advance Cleanup Pace and Reduce Potential Exposure

What We Found

Progress has been made since January 2012 in investigating and cleaning up the CTS of Asheville Superfund site. EPA Region 4 set a schedule for cleanup, and met communication requirements. However, improvements could be made to accelerate the pace of investigations and cleanup. Some site monitoring activities conducted since 2012 did not meet all requirements. In particular:

- Vapor intrusion work plans did not include prior sampling to define a completed exposure pathway, the change in TCE toxicity, and the reassessment of prior results against the new standards.
- Monitoring was too limited to characterize TCE around the vapor removal system perimeter fence.

EPA Region 4 can accelerate the cleanup and completeness of work, and improve public communications, to better control human exposure to unsafe industrial contamination at the CTS site.

Further, some of the investigations were delayed as the region worked to obtain access to private property, and the region's communication efforts were not always effective, thus hampering the progress of site investigations. The region has not met its commitment to provide online access to documents. In addition, the region missed the opportunity to start the sitewide investigation needed to integrate the focused investigative and cleanup efforts, and to prepare for sitewide cleanup. As a result, the region's site manager had less time to devote to managing the cleanup due to high communication demands, residents potentially experienced prolonged exposure to TCE, and EPA and public health costs potentially increased.

Recommendations and Agency Response

We made 12 recommendations to improve the region's procedures for site investigation, sampling, monitoring, and communicating with the public. Based on the region's response and a meeting on the response, most recommendations are resolved; three recommendations and parts of another are unresolved with resolution efforts in progress.

Noteworthy Achievements

According to the EPA, human exposure to contamination at the site now is under control. Region 4 implemented steps to accelerate the pace of cleanup and protect human health, such as requiring the responsible party to construct a removal system to address unsafe levels of TCE in nearby homes. The region also approved a cleanup approach for part of the contaminant source.