



# At a Glance

## Why We Did This Project

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) conducted this audit to determine whether the EPA followed applicable criteria, such as laws and rules, in creating the Superfund Task Force (SFTF) and developing the task force's July 2017 report and recommendations.

On May 22, 2017, then EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt established the SFTF and charged it with providing recommendations within 30 days for improving and expediting site cleanups and promoting redevelopment. On July 25, 2017, the EPA's SFTF released its report and recommendations.

Among other issues, nongovernmental organizations expressed concerns about the need for transparency and the possibility that the SFTF favored enhanced economic development over public health.

### This report addresses the following:

- *Cleaning up and revitalizing land.*

Address inquiries to our public affairs office at (202) 566-2391 or [OIG\\_WEBCOMMENTS@epa.gov](mailto:OIG_WEBCOMMENTS@epa.gov).

List of [OIG reports](#).

## ***EPA Complied with Applicable Laws and Rules for the July 2017 Superfund Task Force Report but Could Improve Transparency***

### What We Found

We found that the EPA created and preserved documentation of the organization and decisions of the SFTF in accordance with applicable recordkeeping requirements. The SFTF report recommendations were developed by EPA staff with experience in the Superfund program or related programs. We asked interviewees if unsolicited communications from industry, trade groups and individual companies impacted the recommendations. No interviewee indicated that communications from outside sources had an impact.

**Emphasizing the role of EPA career staff in the SFTF would have enhanced the transparency of the project and perhaps alleviated public concerns about the process.**

The SFTF report did not contain details about the process or list specific contributors to the report, as some similar Superfund studies have done. The SFTF report included an executive summary stating that "upwards of 80 highly experienced EPA professionals, including management and staff, were involved." The report also listed the names of individuals who led five groups, each representing one of five goal areas, stating they used their extensive program knowledge and experience to develop the specific actions in the report.

More than half of the SFTF members that we interviewed volunteered that the SFTF report was generated through the efforts of career EPA staff, consistent with prior Superfund reports. Further, task force members noted that while the SFTF goals were focused on economic issues associated with site cleanup and reutilization, the Superfund program's responsibility to protect human health and the environment did not change. We heard positive feedback from task force members, such as it was a collaborative process or a helpful effort.

The EPA report could have been more transparent with regard to the process used and the qualifications of the personnel involved, to allay public concerns and increase confidence in the recommendations.

### Recommendation and Planned Agency Corrective Action

We recommend that the Deputy Administrator publish detailed information on the task force website about the SFTF effort, including details about the roles and responsibilities of career EPA staff. The agency agreed with the recommendation, and the recommendation is resolved with the agreed-to action pending.