

# **This Is Superfund**

## **A Citizen's Guide to EPA's Superfund Program**



United States Environmental Protection Agency  
Office of Emergency & Remedial Response  
Washington, DC 20460

## Introduction

If there is a Superfund site in your neighborhood, you are probably wondering, “What will happen?” and “What can I do?” Hazardous waste sites pose threats to human health and natural resources. The Superfund Program cleans up these sites to protect people and the environment, and to return the land to productive use. This brochure will give you a better understanding of the Superfund process and how you can become involved.

## What Is Superfund?

Years ago, people did not understand how certain wastes might affect our health and the environment. Many wastes were dumped on the ground, in rivers, or left out in the open. As a result, thousands of uncontrolled or abandoned hazardous waste sites were created. Some common hazardous waste sites include abandoned warehouses, manufacturing facilities, processing plants and landfills.

In response to growing concern over the health and environmental risks posed by hazardous waste sites, Congress established the Superfund Program in 1980 to clean up these sites. The Superfund Program is administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in cooperation with individual state and tribal governments. Superfund locates, investigates and cleans up certain hazardous waste sites throughout the United States. The Superfund trust fund was set up to help pay for the cleanup of these sites. The money comes mainly from taxes on the chemical and petroleum industries. The trust fund is used primarily when the companies or people responsible for contamination at Superfund sites cannot be found, or cannot perform or pay for the cleanup work.

## How Are Superfund Sites Discovered?

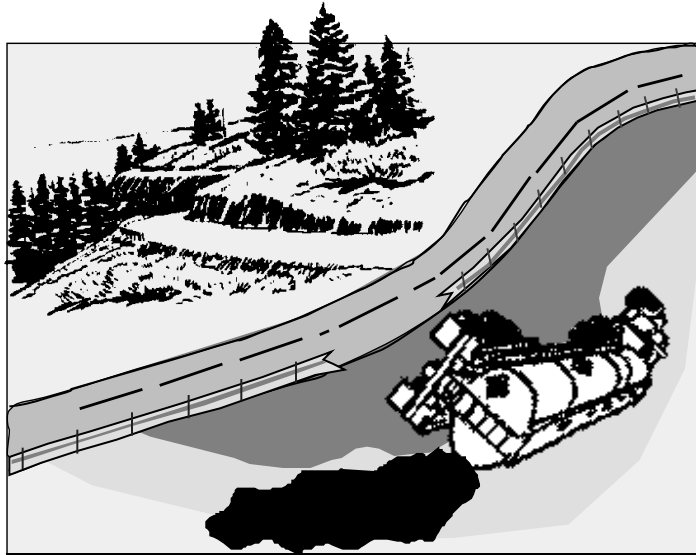
Hazardous waste sites are discovered by local and state government agencies, businesses, the U.S. EPA, the U.S. Coast Guard, and by people like you. You can report emergencies resulting from a release of a hazardous substance to the National Response Center Hotline. To report an emergency, you should call the hotline at **1-800-424-8802**. This hotline is operated 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You can report potential hazardous waste sites or problems to your state and local authorities. They are listed separately in your phone book.



## What Happens When There Is A Chemical Emergency?

A number of the sites reported to the National Response Center are emergencies and require immediate action. Emergency actions are taken to eliminate immediate risks and ensure public safety. Superfund's first priority is to protect the people and the environment near these sites.

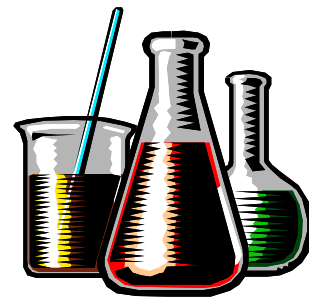
EPA's Superfund personnel are on call to respond at a moment's notice to chemical emergencies, accidents, or releases. Typical chemical emergencies may include train derailments, truck accidents, and incidents at chemical plants where there is a chemical release or threat of a release to the environment. EPA may respond or may help state and local authorities deal with these emergencies quickly. The hazardous materials are hauled away from the site for treatment or proper disposal, or they are treated at the site to make them safe. The risk to the community is removed.



In an emergency situation, you and your community will be kept informed of the situation and what steps are being taken to ensure your safety. EPA then evaluates the site and determines whether additional cleanup is necessary.

## What Happens To Sites That Are Not Emergencies?

When a potential hazardous waste site is reported, EPA reviews the site to determine what type of action is necessary. EPA look at existing information, inspects the site, and may interview nearby residents to find out the history of the site and its effects on the population and the environment.



Many of the sites that are reviewed do not meet the criteria for Federal Superfund cleanup action. Some sites do not require any action, while others are referred to the states, other programs, other agencies, or individuals for cleanup or other action.

For the sites that do meet the criteria, EPA tests the soil, water, and air to determine what hazardous substances were left at the site and how serious the risks may be to human health and the environment.

Early Actions are taken when EPA determines that a site may become a threat to you or your environment in the near future. For example, there may be a site where leaking drums of hazardous substances could ignite or cause harm to you if touched or inhaled. In this kind of situation, EPA acts to make sure the problem is quickly addressed and the site is safe. Typically, Early Actions are taken to:

- Prevent direct human contact with the contaminants at the site
- Remove hazardous materials from the site
- Prevent contaminants from spreading off the site
- Provide water to residents whose drinking water has been contaminated by the site
- Temporarily or permanently evacuate/relocate nearby residents.

Early Actions may take anywhere from a few days to five years to complete, depending on the type and extent of contamination. During this time, EPA also determines if Long-Term Action will be necessary.

Parties responsible for the contamination at the site may conduct these assessments under close EPA supervision. Their involvement in the study and cleanup process is critical in order to make best use of Superfund resources. EPA uses the information collected to decide what type of action, if any, is required.

At this point, EPA prepares a Community Relations Plan (CRP) to ensure community involvement. This plan is based on discussions with local leaders and private citizens in the community. In addition, EPA sets up a local information file in the community so that people living near the site can get information about the site. The information file or “repository” is usually located at a library or public school and contains the official record of the site, reports, and activities (called the Administrative Record), as well as additional site-related information.

## **Who Is Involved In Superfund Cleanups?**

Superfund cleanups are very complex and require the efforts of many experts in science, engineering, public health, management, law, community involvement, and numerous other fields. The goal of the process is to protect you and the environment you live in from the effects of hazardous substances.

Your involvement is very important. You have the opportunity and the right to be involved in and to comment on the work being done.

## Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) Program

EPA values your input and wants to help you understand the technical information relating to the cleanup of Superfund sites in your community so that you can make informed decisions.

Under the Superfund law, EPA can award Technical Assistance Grants (TAGs) of up to \$50,000 per site. TAGs allow communities to hire an independent expert to help them interpret technical data, understand site hazards, and become more knowledgeable about the different technologies that are being used to clean up sites.

Your community group may be eligible for a TAG if you are affected by a Superfund site that is on or proposed to be added to the National Priorities List.

More information about TAGs is available from your Regional EPA Community Involvement Coordinator. The telephone number for your coordinator is listed at the end of this brochure.



## What Is The National Priorities List?

The National Priorities List (NPL) is a published list of hazardous waste sites in the country that are eligible for Federal funding to pay for extensive, long-term cleanup actions under the Superfund program.

## How Do The Sites Get On The National Priorities List?

To evaluate the dangers posed by hazardous waste sites, EPA developed a scoring system called the Hazard Ranking System (HRS). EPA uses the information collected during the assessment phase of the process to score sites according to the danger they may pose to public health and the environment. Sites that score high enough on the HRS are eligible for the NPL. Once a site is scored and meets the criteria, EPA proposes that it be put on the NPL. The proposal is published in the Federal Register and the public has an opportunity to comment in writing on whether the site should be included on the NPL. To obtain more information on a proposed site, contact your Community Involvement Coordinator.



## The Superfund Process

The Superfund process begins when a site is discovered. After EPA screens and assesses the site, the Regional Decision Team determines if the site requires Early Action, Long-Term Action, or both. Early Actions are taken at sites that may pose immediate threats to people or the environment. Long-Term Actions are taken at sites that require extensive cleanup. EPA encourages community involvement throughout the process.

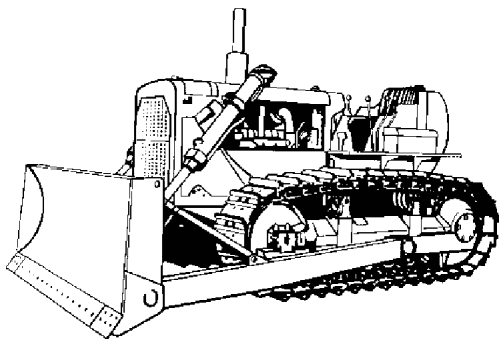


## What Happens During A Long-Term Cleanup?

Early Actions can correct many hazardous waste problems and eliminate most threats to human health and the environment. Some sites, however, require Long-Term Action. Long-Term Actions include cleaning up contaminated groundwater and taking measures to protect wetlands, animals, estuaries, and other ecological resources. Long-term cleanups are complex and can take many years to complete. This process is conducted in several phases that lead to the ultimate goal of cleaning up the site and providing a safe environment for the people living near the site. Throughout the process, there is opportunity for community involvement.

First, a detailed study of the site is done to identify the cause and extent of contamination at the site, the possible threats to the environment and the people nearby, and options for cleaning up the site.

EPA uses this information to develop and present a Proposed Plan for Long-Term Cleanup to citizens and to local and state officials for comment. The Proposed Plan describes the various cleanup options under consideration and identifies the option EPA prefers. The community has at least 30 days to comment on the Proposed Plan. EPA invites community members to a public meeting to express their views and discuss the Plan with EPA (and sometimes state) officials.



Once the public's concerns are addressed, EPA publishes a Record of Decision, which describes how it plans to clean up the site. A notice is also placed in the local newspaper to inform the community of the cleanup decision.

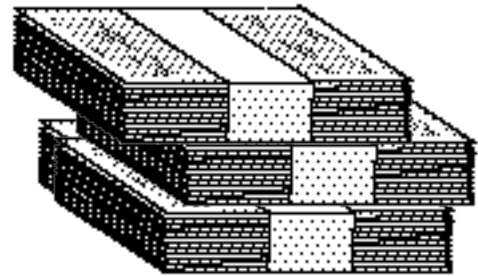
Next, the cleanup method is designed to address the unique conditions at the site where it will be used. This is called the Remedial Design. The design and actual cleanup is conducted by EPA,

the state, or by the parties responsible for the contamination at the site. If EPA does not perform the design, it closely oversees this design phase and the development of the cleanup at the site. When the design is completed, EPA prepares and distributes a fact sheet to the community describing the design and the action that will take place at the site.

EPA can supply the equipment and manpower necessary to clean up a site, but it may take a long time to return a site to the way it was before it was contaminated. Some sites, due to the extent of contamination, will never return to the way they were prior to the pollution; however, EPA will make sure that the site will be safe for the people living around the site now and in the future. EPA regularly monitors every NPL site to make sure it remains safe. If there is any indication that there is a problem, action will be taken to make the site safe again.

## Who Pays For Superfund Cleanup?

Superfund cleanup is either paid for by the people and businesses responsible for contamination or by the Superfund trust fund. Under the Superfund law, EPA is able to make those companies and individuals responsible for contamination at a Superfund site perform, and pay for, the cleanup work at the site. EPA negotiates with the responsible parties to get them to pay for the plans and the work that has to be done to clean up the site. If an agreement cannot be reached, EPA issues orders to responsible parties to make them clean up the site under EPA supervision. Superfund ensures that the parties responsible for the pollution pay to fix the problems they created. EPA may also use Superfund trust fund money to pay for cleanup costs, then attempt to get the money back through legal action.



## Conclusion

EPA's Superfund Program is the most aggressive hazardous waste cleanup program in the world. Every day Superfund managers are involved in critical decisions that affect public health and the environment. They use the best available science to determine risks at sites. New and innovative technologies are being developed to help find faster and less expensive ways to cleanup sites.

Wherever possible, old hazardous waste sites are being restored to productive use. Millions of people have been protected by Superfund's cleanup activities.

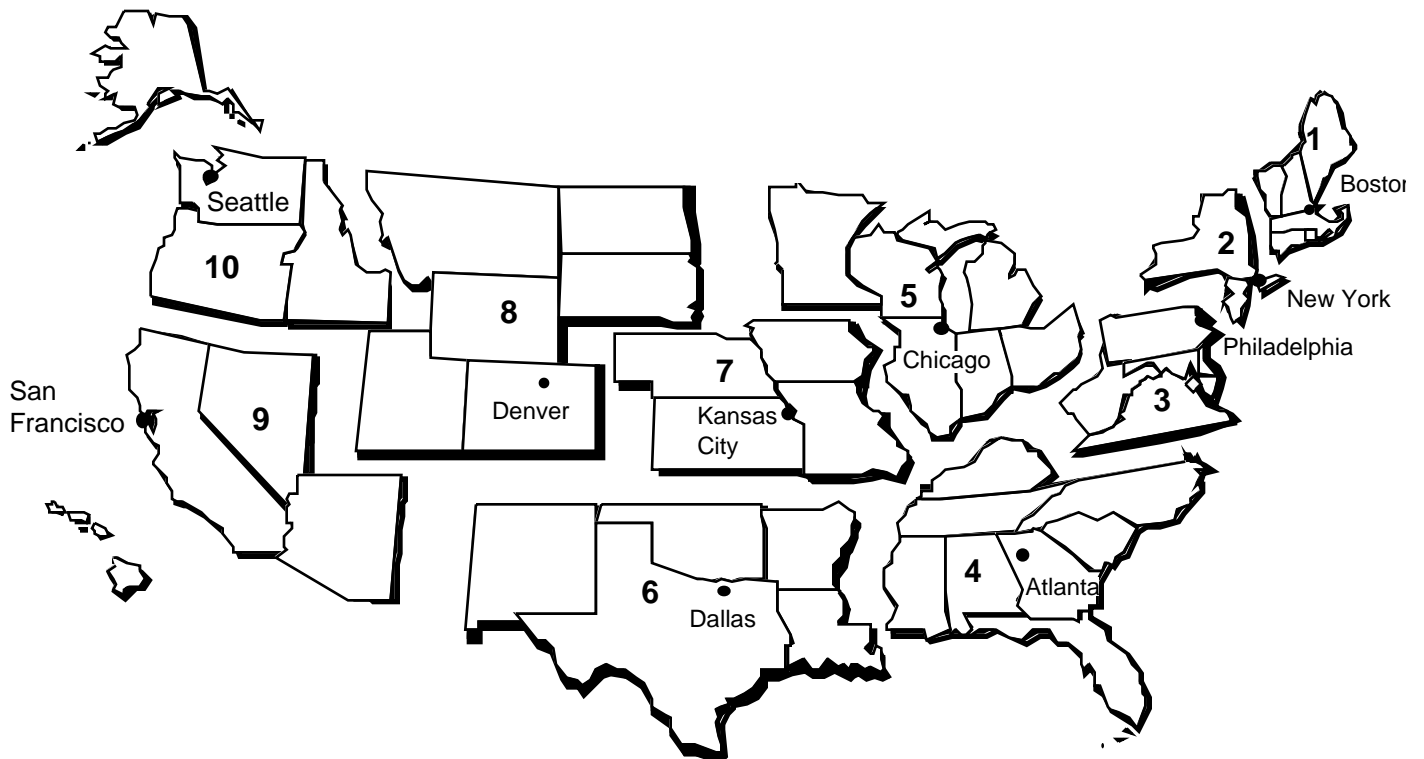


The Superfund Program has one ultimate goal: to protect YOUR health and YOUR environment. Protecting communities and the environment is what Superfund is all about.

# EPA Superfund Community Involvement Offices

EPA wants to remain accessible and responsive to your concerns. Our community involvement staff is available to answer any questions you may have regarding a Superfund site or an area you think may be a site. Here is a list of the Community Involvement Offices at EPA's Regional Offices.

## EPA Regional Offices



**Region 1 (617) 565-3425**

**Region 2 (212) 637-3675**

**Region 3 (215) 597-9905**

**Region 4 (404) 347-3555 x6264**

**Region 5 (312) 886-6685**

**Region 6 (214) 665-6617**

**Region 7 (913) 551-7003**

**Region 8 (303) 312-6600**

**Region 9 (415) 744-2175**

**Region 10 (206) 553-1272**