U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Inspector General

15-P-0198
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At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We evaluated how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set and measured specific goals for its activities related to siting renewable energy on potentially contaminated land and mine sites (hereafter referred to as contaminated lands), such as economic and environmental return on investment, and whether siting efforts ensure short- and long-term health and environmental protection on these contaminated sites.

In 2008, the EPA's Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response launched the RE-Powering America's Land Initiative, through which the EPA encourages renewable energy development on contaminated lands. Renewable energy is energy obtained from sources that can be continually replenished, such as solar, wind and biomass.

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

- *Cleaning up communities and advancing sustainable development.*

For further information, contact our public affairs office at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2015/20150716-15-P-0198.pdf

Benefits of EPA Initiative to Promote Renewable Energy on Contaminated Lands Have Not Been Established

What We Found

The EPA sets specific goals for its program activities related to promoting and providing education and outreach for siting renewable energy on contaminated lands through its RE-Powering America's Land Initiative. However, the EPA does not have a mechanism to measure the outcomes of accomplishing initiative goals, nor does it have information on the return on investment realized for the activities completed or resources the agency stated it has invested.

EPA does not know the benefits realized from its efforts to promote siting renewable energy on contaminated lands. As a result, the agency is unable to demonstrate benefits realized for the $4 million it stated it has invested in these efforts since 2008.

Regarding the return on investment, the EPA stated it has invested $4 million in the initiative, including just over $2.5 million to support more than 40 feasibility studies that provide site owners and communities with a technical and economic assessment of installing renewable energy on a given site, and development of initiative tools. Seventy-six percent of the studies completed showed some potential for siting renewable energy on contaminated lands. However, the EPA was aware of only two sites with renewable energy that benefitted from feasibility studies. Consumer awareness or use of initiative tools could also be an indicator of return on investment. Four of seven external parties involved with siting renewable energy on contaminated lands with whom we spoke were unaware of the initiative or did not use the tools it provides. Without benefits information and consumer awareness or utility, the EPA is unable to demonstrate results of the initiative and support continuing the program.

The EPA's RE-Powering America's Land Initiative does not address human health and environmental protection issues when renewable energy is sited on contaminated lands. However, the initiative could refer to guidance from other EPA programs that have such controls, including periodic reviews or monitoring, to maintain protectiveness.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the EPA determine whether the benefits from its renewable energy promotion efforts demonstrate the value of the RE-Powering initiative. If benefits cannot be demonstrated, the EPA should modify or terminate the program. If the EPA continues with this initiative, it should establish management controls to measure and report on progress, use available data to track and report on economic and environmental benefits realized, and refer participants to EPA guidance covering human health and environmental protection. The agency provided sufficient planned corrective actions and estimated completion dates for all of our recommendations. All recommendations are considered resolved and open with corrective actions ongoing.