



# At a Glance

## Why We Did This Project

We conducted this audit to determine how the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) preparedness and response efforts for the three major hurricanes of calendar year 2017—specifically, hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria—protected human health and water resources from storm-related drinking water and surface water contamination. This report addresses the Region 6 response to the drinking water and wastewater facilities impacted by Hurricane Harvey.

Hurricane Harvey made landfall as a Category 4 storm on August 25, 2017. In Texas alone, Hurricane Harvey claimed 68 lives, dropped approximately 19 trillion gallons of rainwater and caused damages estimated at \$125 billion.

### This report addresses the following:

- *Ensuring clean and safe water.*
- *Partnering with states and other stakeholders.*
- *Operating efficiently and effectively.*

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## ***EPA Region 6 Quickly Assessed Water Infrastructure after Hurricane Harvey but Can Improve Emergency Outreach to Disadvantaged Communities***

### What We Found

The EPA Region 6 water-related response focused on determining the operational status of drinking water and wastewater facilities over a 3-week period in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey. Extensive preparation activities and close working relationships with state emergency response partners enabled Region 6 to protect human health and water sector resources as part of its Hurricane Harvey mission assignment. The Region 6 Superfund and Water Quality divisions coordinated with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to conduct drinking water and wastewater facility reviews, as well as to perform limited on-site technical assistance. These reviews enabled EPA and TCEQ response staff to successfully determine and track the operational status of facilities.

**Enhancements to environmental justice outreach efforts during emergencies could improve the public health protections of communities impacted by hurricanes or other disasters.**

While Region 6 successfully fulfilled its water sector mission assignment in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, we identified one area for improvement—staff outreach to residents of vulnerable communities—that would further enhance the region's emergency response capabilities.

### Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the EPA Region 6 Regional Administrator (1) include environmental justice outreach in planning and pre-landfall preparation exercises by gathering data to determine the population, unique needs and challenges of vulnerable communities; (2) revise the Region 6 pre-landfall hurricane plan to incorporate environmental justice outreach; (3) implement the recommendations to improve environmental justice outreach identified at a June 2018 environmental justice forum; and (4) prepare and produce all outreach materials in advance, in sufficient quantities and in the region's prevalent languages, and post all translated materials online.

EPA Region 6 agreed with three of our recommendations but requested a modification to Recommendation 3. However, we determined a modification was not needed, since the region's proposed corrective actions address the intent of Recommendation 3. We therefore consider all four of our recommendations resolved with corrective actions pending. Region 6 officials have agreed to complete corrective actions by March 31, 2021.