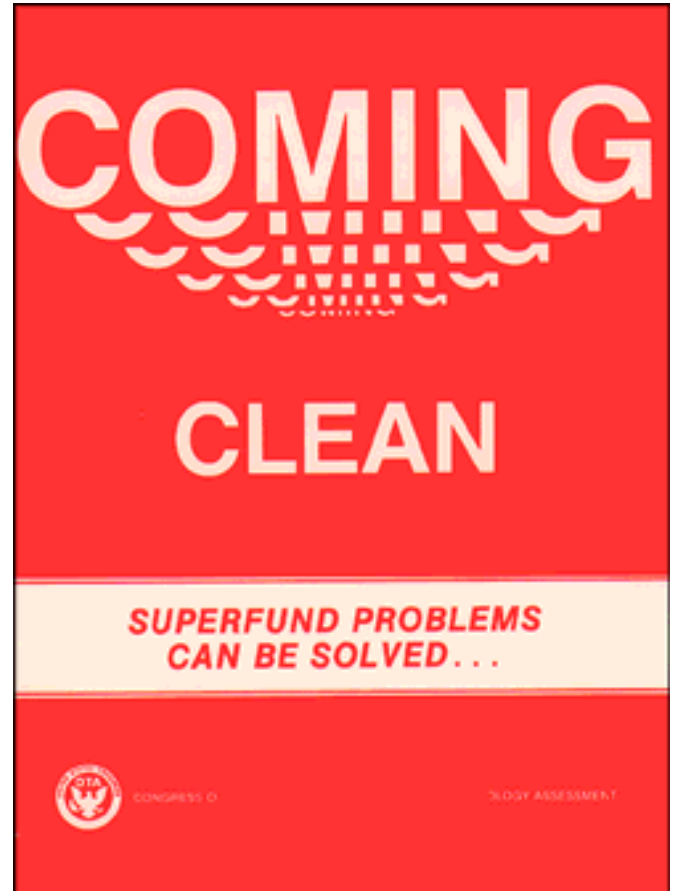


*Coming Clean: Superfund Problems Can
Be Solved...*

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Foreword

This report, which responds to requests from the House Committee on Public Works and Transportation and the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, examines the implementation of the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986. An additional request was received from the Senate Subcommittee on Superfund, Ocean and Water Protection. Before the current assessment, OTA had responded to a number of other congressional requests to examine various aspects of the Superfund program. Previous OTA works on Superfund include *Technologies and Management Strategies for Hazardous Waste Control* (March 1983), *Habitability of the Love Canal Area* (technical memorandum, June 1983), *Superfund Strategy* (April 1985), and a number of special responses on specific Superfund sites. OTA has also published two earlier documents as part of this assessment: *Are We Cleaning Up? 10 Superfund Case Studies* (special report, June 1988); and *Assessing Contractor Use in Superfund* (background paper, January 1989);

OTA recognizes the enormous challenge posed by the Nation's commitment to clean up uncontrolled toxic waste sites. The challenge is to our scientific knowledge about properties, environmental transport, and health effects of toxic substances; to our technological capabilities to manage hazardous waste and cleanups; to our national workforce which, prior to Superfund, had little experience in site cleanup; to the government institutions charged with implementing Superfund, notably the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; and last, but certainly not least, to everyone's patience.

From its beginning, controversy has surrounded Superfund, and the program has had to cope with an unusually high level of public scrutiny, criticism, and debate. OTA is sensitive to the frustrations of many hard-working people trying to meet the Superfund challenge and recognizes that people are still learning. And a great deal has been accomplished, although it is easy to lose sight of the accomplishments amidst all the criticism. For example, hundreds of emergency responses have been successfully carried out, an enormous amount of contamination of land and groundwater has been carefully documented, and the major, near-term threats at many sites have been eliminated. Yet most of the national cleanup job lies ahead of us and the need to get increasing effectiveness per dollar spent is bound to grow.

In this report, OTA concludes that there is ample reason to be optimistic about the potential of the Superfund program and presents a number of possible strategic initiatives and incremental program changes in some detail. As difficult as the national cleanup job is, there are many ways to build a better balance between health and environmental needs and the limitations that technology, experience, and economics will always impose. OTA thanks the project's advisory panel members for their invaluable assistance and appreciates the contributions made by all the other reviewers of the drafts of this report. But the contents of this report are solely OTA's responsibility.


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NOTE: OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the advisory panel members. The panel does not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.

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