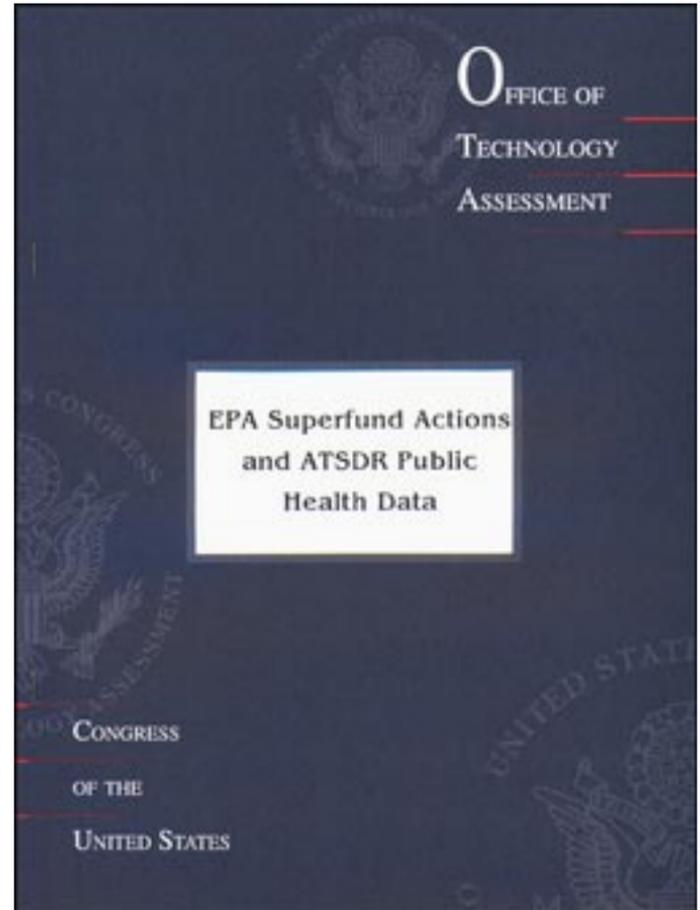


*EPA Superfund Actions and ATSDR Public
Health Data*

July 1995

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Foreword

The Superfund program, authorized by Congress 15 years ago, was intended to address the clean up of U.S. hazardous waste sites. Implicit in the Superfund program is the idea that human health concerns are a key factor in establishing in clean up criteria for abandoned or orphaned hazardous waste sites. However, the Superfund program as administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has come under increasing criticism from various quarters as not focusing on actual human health concerns related to possible exposure to chemical wastes. The House Committee on Commerce, Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Hazardous Materials, asked the Office of Technology to examine how EPA has set cleanup priorities in response to Superfund site health ranking data provided by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (ATSDR). The Subcommittee also asked OTA to examine how EPA has responded to completed exposure pathways identified by ATSDR for certain Superfund sites.

This background paper discusses how EPA sets Superfund cleanup priorities based on Superfund site health ranking data provided by ATSDR. It examines several parameters by which EPA site prioritization might be measured, including timeliness, cost, and use of special removal actions at the worst sites.

OTA found that EPA prioritizes cleanup of Superfund sites based on many other factors in addition to current public health risks. EPA must also take into account future potential health risks, as well as several other factors. Therefore, cleanup prioritization often do not correspond with ATSDR's public health rankings. Nevertheless, removal actions to address pressing health concerns are more frequent at higher hazard sites, and more money is spent in cleanup at these sites. Thus despite the fact that public health risk is only one criteria among many by which EPA sets cleanup priorities, there is no evidence that EPA is giving a lower priority to cleaning up the worst sites.

OTA appreciates the assistance and support it received for this effort from many contributors and reviewers, including EPA and ATSDR. They provided OTA with valuable information critical to the completion of this background paper and important insights about its technical evaluations and projections. OTA, however, remains solely responsible for the contents of this report.



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Note: OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the reviewers. The reviewers do not, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this background paper. OTA assumes full responsibility for the background paper and the accuracy of its contents.

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