

OVERVIEW

THE AUDITOR
STATE OF HAWAII

Follow-Up Audit of the Waste Management Programs of the Department of Health

Summary

The Office of the Auditor conducted a follow-up audit of the Department of Health's waste management programs for the period from February 1994 to January 1996. The audit examined the extent to which the department has implemented our prior recommendations contained in the *Audit of the Hazardous Waste Management Program of the Department of Health*, Report No. 94-3.

In our follow-up, we found that support for the waste management programs remains uncertain. Budget support for the hazardous waste program is unstable, and the department has delayed federal authorization for the hazardous waste and underground storage tank programs. Many positions in the Solid and Hazardous Waste Branch remain vacant. The uncertain support has hindered the waste management programs from effectively ensuring adequate protection from improperly disposed wastes and leaking underground storage tanks.

The department's enforcement of regulations covering hazardous waste handlers has weakened. Site visits and inspections are infrequent, and many facilities do not comply with requirements. Repeat offenses by large facilities and widespread noncompliance with notification requirements indicate that the program has been ineffective in enforcing compliance of the regulations.

We also found that solid waste control needs improvement. While the department's reporting to the Legislature on waste reduction has improved, monitoring and enforcement of regulations for municipal solid waste landfills are weak. Landfill inspections are infrequent, especially on the neighbor islands, and some illegal dumpers have escaped enforcement.

In addition, we found that regulation of underground storage tanks does not adequately protect the public from the risk of leaking tanks. The State conducts routine inspections no more than once every 20 years, on average. Oversight of federal preventative requirements such as installing leak detection equipment is uneven, resulting in incomplete information on the extent of compliance. There is a growing risk of future leaks due to the increasing number of facilities with leaking underground storage tanks that have not initiated cleanup.

Databases for program management are flawed. Information in the database for the underground storage tank program often differed from information in corresponding paper files. Information in the permit database for the solid waste program is not current.



Finally, we found that responsibilities for monitoring generators of infectious waste need clarification. The department has not coordinated its monitoring and therefore information on compliance with infectious waste regulations is incomplete.

Recommendations and Response

We recommend that the Department of Health provide sufficient support to the waste management programs to enable them to meet their stated goals. This should include securing stable funding within existing budget constraints, achieving federal authorization for the hazardous waste and underground storage tank programs as soon as possible, and working to fill vacant positions with qualified staff. We recommend an increase in the number of inspection staff and other improvements in the department's monitoring, enforcement, databases, and coordination.

The department concurs with our recommendations.

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