



# SUPERFUND PROGRAM

## Current Status and Future Fiscal Challenges

Highlights of [GAO-03-850](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

### Why GAO Did This Study

Congress established the Superfund program in 1980 to clean up highly contaminated hazardous waste sites. Among other things, the law established a trust fund to help the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) pay for cleanups and related program activities. The trust fund was financed primarily by three dedicated taxes until 1995, when the taxing authority expired. EPA continues to discover sites eligible for cleanup under the Superfund program.

GAO was asked to examine the current status of the Superfund program, the factors guiding EPA's selection of sites to be placed on its National Priorities List, and the program's future outlook.

### What GAO Recommends

In considering changes to the program to address future challenges associated with the Superfund program's fiscal uncertainty, GAO recommends that the Administrator, EPA, develop indicators that can be used to measure program performance.

EPA generally agreed with this report's findings and recommendation but provided a number of comments, which we incorporated in this report as appropriate.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-850](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-850).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact John B. Stephenson at (202) 512-3841 or [stephensonj@gao.gov](mailto:stephensonj@gao.gov).

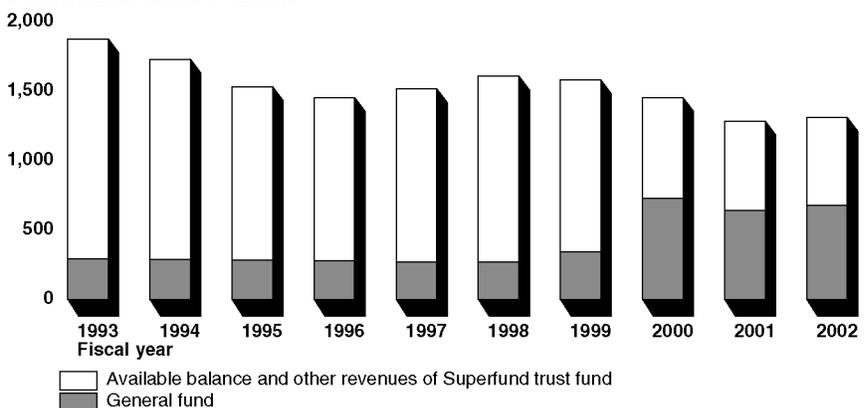
### What GAO Found

The balance of the Superfund trust fund available for future appropriations has decreased significantly since 1996, while highly contaminated hazardous waste sites continue to be added to the National Priorities List (NPL), EPA's list of the nation's most contaminated sites. A decline in revenues to the trust fund has led the Superfund program to rely increasingly on appropriations from the general fund. In EPA's fiscal year 2004 budget request for the Superfund program, the general fund appropriation would make up about 80 percent of the program's total appropriation.

At the end of fiscal year 2002, the NPL had 1,233 sites in various stages of cleanup. EPA considers many factors in selecting from the sites that are eligible to be listed, the most prominent of which are the availability of alternative federal or state programs that could be used to clean up the site, the status of responsible parties associated with the sites, and the cost and complexity of the cleanup required.

As the Superfund program continues to add sites to the NPL and funding sources shift toward general fund appropriations, the effect of EPA's actions to address future program challenges remains uncertain. Because Superfund lacks indicators to fully measure the outcomes of the program's cleanup efforts, EPA has asked an advisory council to develop criteria by which to measure the program's progress. However, it is unclear whether the advisory council will reach consensus on its recommendations, and its findings are not expected until December 2003, at the earliest. Performance indicators could help EPA and the Congress make the difficult funding, policy, and program decisions that the current budget environment demands.

**Total Appropriations to the Superfund Program, Fiscal Years 1993 through 2002**  
Constant 2002 dollars in millions



Source: The President's Budget Appendix, fiscal years 1995 through 2004.

Note: These appropriations do not include spending authority for offsetting collections.