

Slowdown in Superfund Site Cleanups

- When the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) was enacted in 1980, the Superfund program was funded with polluter pays taxes; Congress allowed these taxes to lapse in 1995.
- Between 1981 and 1998, \$13.5 billion in taxes were collected under the Superfund polluter pays system.¹
 - Taxes were collected between 1995 and 1998 because of private-sector debts and corrections made by the US Treasury when adjusting allocations made to various federal trust funds.
- While polluter pays taxes were still being collected, the Superfund program thrived. Of 640 nonfederal sites on the National Priorities List (NPL) in mid-April 1999:
 - 376 were in the remedial investigation and feasibility study phase.
 - 133 were in the remedial design phase.
 - 131 were in the remedial action phase.
- At the end of FY 1999, the Superfund balance was \$1.4 billion.¹ By 2003, the Superfund trust fund ran out of money collected from polluter pays taxes.²
- After the Superfund trust fund ran out of polluter pays money, the program began to suffer, as evidenced by the following statistics from 1999 to 2013.³
 - 37% drop in number of remedial actions completed.
 - 84% drop in number of construction completions.
 - Decreased efficiency in completing each project – average completion time for each project increased from 2.6 years to 4 years.
- Additionally, there were significant delays in 33% of all remedial actions that were slated to begin between 1999 and 2013.⁴

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¹ US GAO. (GAO 1999). *Superfund: Information on the Program's Funding and Status*. GAO Report Number GAO/RCED-00-25. Available online at <https://www.gao.gov/archive/2000/rc00025.pdf>.

² US GAO. (GAO 2004). *Superfund Program: Updated Appropriation and Expenditure Data*. GAO Report Number GAO-04-475R. Available online at <https://www.gao.gov/new.items/d04475r.pdf>.

³ US GAO. (GAO 2015). *Superfund: Trends in Federal Funding and Cleanup of EPA's Nonfederal National Priorities List Sites*. GAO Report Number GAO-15-812. Available online at <http://www.gao.gov/assets/680/673051.pdf>