



Superfund

Congress enacted the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), commonly known as Superfund, in 1980. This law created a tax on the chemical and petroleum industries and provided a broad Federal authority to respond directly to releases or threatened releases of hazardous substances that may endanger public health or welfare or the environment. Over 5 years, \$1.6 billion were collected and the tax went to a Trust Fund for cleaning up abandoned or uncontrolled hazardous waste sites. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for running the Superfund program. On October 17, 1986, the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA) was signed into law. SARA increases the Trust Fund to \$8.5 billion over 5 years and strengthens EPA's authority to conduct cleanup and enforcement activities.

Under the Superfund program, EPA can:

- Pay for the cleanup of hazardous waste sites when those responsible for such sites cannot be found or are unwilling or unable to clean up a site.
- Take legal action to force those responsible for hazardous waste sites that threaten public health or the environment to clean up those sites or pay back the Federal government for the costs of cleanup.

The law authorizes two kinds of response actions:

- Short-term removals where actions may be taken to address releases or threats of releases requiring prompt response.
- Longer-term remedial responses that permanently and significantly reduce the dangers associated with releases or threats of releases of hazardous substances that are serious but not immediately life threatening. They can be conducted only at sites on EPA's National Priorities List (NPL).

Remedial and removal responses include, but are not limited to:

- Destroying, detoxifying or immobilizing the hazardous substances on the site through incineration or other treatment technologies.

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- Containing the substances on-site so that they can safely remain there and present no further threat.
 - Removing the materials from the site to an EPA-approved, licensed hazardous waste facility for treatment, containment, or destruction.
 - Identifying and restoring contaminated ground water, halting further spread of the contaminants, or in some circumstances providing an alternate source of drinking water.