

EPA'S CORE WORK ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT

ENFORCING ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS

President Richard Nixon created EPA in 1970 with the express purpose of establishing “an autonomous regulatory body to oversee the enforcement of environmental policy.” Far from being onerous, the regulatory process has protected people’s health and the natural world, prevented pollution and supported the responsible use of the land we share.

Since EPA’s founding, Congress has enacted many federal laws, including the Clean Water Act; the Safe Drinking Water Act; the Clean Air Act; the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act known as Superfund; and other important legislation to protect people’s health and the environment from pollution. EPA works closely with attorneys at the U.S. Department of Justice to ensure that individuals and companies follow the regulations that flow from federal laws. They take “civil” actions against polluters and can use their “criminal” enforcement authority against those who willfully violate the law.

- **Providing Reliable Data** – Fair and independent data is critical to understanding whether the rules are being followed. EPA’s multiple data systems monitor polluting facilities and track enforcement actions; this data also helps states that have enforcement responsibilities. A widely used online database allows the public to track whether facilities in their communities are in compliance.
- **Inspecting Facilities** – Nothing beats on-the-ground inspections to ensure that regulated facilities are complying with federal rules and regulations. Throughout the country, EPA trained and certified inspectors travel vast distances to meet with facility representatives, review records and reports, take photographs and samples and observe operations.
- **Stopping Environmental Crimes** – Sometimes companies willfully put communities at risk. Criminal enforcement is used to catch companies that cause deaths and serious injuries by cutting corners and lie about pollution from their facilities. Preparing criminal cases can be labor intensive, involving extensive legal and scientific research, data collection and analysis and investigations. But the results are critically important for the communities exposed to danger by companies that don’t follow the rules.
- **Pursuing Polluters** – The pursuit of those responsible for contamination at Superfund sites across the country is critical to their cleanup. Superfund has a long-standing policy that polluters pay for cleanups, but when parties that created the contamination cannot be found, are no longer alive or are bankrupt, the government must cover cleanup costs. Identifying those responsible for contamination is resource intensive, but pays off in lowered government costs. Every dollar spent on efforts to get polluters to pay returns about \$8 in cleanup commitments, a worthwhile investment.