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HEADLINE: EPA begins new review into DEQ

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BODY:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency opened another review of activities related to the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.

The EPA's inspector general has begun a review of its regional office's oversight of DEQ. EPA is already investigating Louisiana's **air** permitting program and its regional office's oversight of DEQ's water permitting program.

The inspector general added a review of the oversight of air and waste permitting.

Congress initially gave EPA the job of regulating air, water and waste but allowed the agency to delegate that authority to the states.

EPA delegated its authority in Louisiana but still must oversee the state's performance.

Several Louisiana groups have formally asked EPA to take back the authority to issue permits and enforce regulations, claiming DEQ is not doing an adequate job.

The EPA inspector general began reviewing air permitting program records in Baton Rouge last fall, said David Bary, the EPA spokesman in its Region 6, which includes Louisiana. The inspector general also began reviewing records in Dallas of EPA's oversight of the state's water, air and solid waste program.

The Baton Rouge review of air-permitting records should be complete by early July, Bary said Wednesday. A report on the audit of EPA's oversight will take months longer.

In October, the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, on behalf of 11 groups, filed a petition asking EPA to take away the state's authority to regulate water. The EPA inspector general initiated an "informal" review of EPA's oversight of water programs in January.

Meanwhile, the Louisiana Legislative Auditor's Office reviewed DEQ's activities, in coordination with the EPA inspector general's review of air permitting.

In early March, Legislative Auditor Dan Kyle released a scathing report with 17 recommendations for changes in the way DEQ issues permits, inspects polluters, enforces regulations and collects fines.

At the time, DEQ Secretary Dale Givens said the agency was aware of most of the problems and was working to solve them. DEQ didn't get enough money to do all the work assigned to it, the secretary said.

In mid-March, the Legislature let DEQ raise fees 20 percent starting July 1. Then, starting July 1, 2003, DEQ can increase fees another 10 percent. The measures would raise about \$7.5 million in the first year and \$10 million each year after that. Most of DEQ's budget comes from fees and licenses bought by the entities it regulates.

In early March, citing some of the Legislative Auditor's findings, the Concerned Citizens of New Sarpy, the Louisiana **Bucket Brigade**, the Refinery Reform Project of the Texas Sustainable Energy and Economic Development Coalition and the Louisiana Environmental Action Network petitioned EPA to revoke the state's authority to oversee air pollution and hazardous waste.

On March 29 EPA Inspector General Nikki L. Tinsley wrote to New Sarpy Concerned Citizens saying "based on specific concerns raised in your letter and petition, we are expanding our audit to review EPA oversight of" the state's air regulation and rules for solid and hazardous wastes.

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