NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF STANDARDS AND TECHNOLOGY

NIST FY 1996 Charges to the Environmental Protection Agency

EDAD-10062-7-0001/August 1997

Office of Audits
Economic Development Audits Division
MEMORANDUM FOR: John C. McGuffin  
Controller  
National Institute of Standards and Technology

FROM: Andrew R. Cochrane  
Director, Economic Development Audits Division  
Office of Audits

SUBJECT: NIST FY 1996 Superfund Charges to the Environmental Protection Agency  
Final Report No. EDAD-10062-7-0001

The Office of Inspector General has completed its audit of NIST’s use of EPA Superfund appropriations and prepared the final audit report. The audit was completed to fulfill the requirement under the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986 for an annual audit of all Superfund payments and obligations.

We found that NIST had accurately accumulated, documented and charged the Superfund reimbursable costs for the funds received. The funds were received in advance for all the work performed by NIST. Our evaluation of the agency’s compliance with laws and regulations indicated that NIST was in compliance with the relevant financial provisions of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980, as amended.

NIST also was in compliance with the terms and conditions of the interagency agreement, and controls over Superfund activities were adequate. During fiscal year 1996 NIST properly tracked EPA Superfund monies by providing segregated cost centers for the Superfund expenditures. As a result, we are issuing this report in final form with no recommendations for future action by NIST.

We appreciate the cooperation and courtesies extended to us by NIST officials during the audit.
Introduction

Among its many efforts to contribute to public health and safety, NIST provides technical research to counteract the effects of toxic waste spills. This work is performed on a reimbursable basis through interagency agreements with the EPA. Funds for the agreements are appropriated through the Hazardous Substance Response Trust Fund, more commonly referred to as the “Superfund.” The Superfund is used to identify the nation’s uncontrolled hazardous waste sites, assign priorities to the risks they create and work to eliminate those risks.

The Superfund program, created under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980, established the Superfund to provide funds for identifying, prioritizing, andremedying the nation’s uncontrolled hazardous waste sites. The 1980 Act, as amended by the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986, provides for full recovery from responsible parties of all response costs incurred by the Federal Government. Response costs generally include expenses for investigations, cleanup, enforcement, and administrative activities.

The 1986 Act also provides that the Inspector General will conduct an annual audit of all payments, obligations, reimbursements, or other uses of the Superfund to assure that the fund is being properly administered.

Purpose and Scope of Audit

The purpose of our audit was to determine whether NIST had properly managed the financial aspects of its Superfund interagency agreements. We evaluated whether NIST had (1) accurately accumulated, documented and charged EPA for the Superfund reimbursable costs; (2) established adequate internal controls over reimbursable work related to the interagency agreement; and (3) complied with the terms and conditions of its Superfund interagency agreement with EPA. Our review covered interagency agreements entered into or continuing between EPA and NIST during the period October 1, 1995 through September 30, 1996.

We reviewed NIST’s policies and procedures for accepting reimbursable work, identifying and assigning actual costs to the project, and recovering all eligible costs. We also interviewed NIST’s scientific and administrative personnel. Our review was conducted at NIST offices in Gaithersburg, Maryland from June through July 1997.

To confirm direct costs, we reviewed the agency’s financial and program records as well as EPA documents and records. In reviewing indirect costs, we limited the scope of our review to performing an analytical review of indirect costs and rates charged, investigating any differences from the previous fiscal year. We found no significant unexplained differences in the indirect cost rates we compared.

Our audit included an evaluation of internal controls to the extent that they related to the administration of the Superfund interagency agreements with EPA. We relied upon our own review, as well as the internal control reviews performed by the independent accountants for NIST for fiscal
year 1996. We found reasonable assurance that there was no material weakness in the recording of
the Superfund appropriations.

In our review, we relied on computer-based data obtained from NIST's Office of the Controller. We
assessed the reliability of the data by tracing it to source documents and comparing it to other
summary data prepared by the laboratories. We found the data sufficiently reliable to be used in
meeting the audit objectives. In addition we evaluated the agency's compliance with laws and
regulations applicable to the Superfund monies. We identified the Comprehensive Environmental
Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 as amended, as the authorizing and governing
legislation. The terms and conditions of the interagency agreement were identified. The review was
conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards, and was performed
under the authority of the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, and Department Organization

Superfund Charges Accurately Accumulated, Documented and Billed

One NIST operating unit administered a single Superfund interagency agreement with EPA during
fiscal year 1996. The Technology Laboratory received funding of $300,000 during FY 1995, of
which $170,320 was unobligated at the beginning of FY 1996. The laboratory expended $142,650
during FY 1996 under this continuing agreement.

We tested the accuracy of the accounting data by tracing it to original source documents and to the
NIST/EPA entry recorded in the Working Capital Accounts. We compared the data to summary
information contained in the costs center statements and other documents. All costs were confirmed
to their limitation ledgers and related to the NIST Working Capital Account.

In the Technology Laboratory the data was accurately recorded from time sheets to the labor cost
summaries. The NIST administration overhead charges were properly documented in the cost
center. We traced the indirect costs assigned to the laboratory to the cost center report. The data
recorded in the accounting records was accurate and reliable in all material respects, and reflected
reasonable costs incurred for the services provided by NIST.

We determined that the costs for the interagency agreement projects were appropriately charged.
Costs incurred did not exceed the specified interagency agreement obligation limits. We found that
NIST properly reported the use of their Superfund funds, that all billings appeared reasonable for the
work performed or the objectives anticipated, and that NIST performed in compliance with the
applicable legislation. Moreover, as previously recommended by this office, all costs were
accumulated in a segregated cost center for the work performed under the Superfund interagency
agreement.

The following is the Superfund agreement under which funds were obligated and expenses incurred
during fiscal year 1996:
Summary of FY 1996 Obligations and Disbursements
Under Interagency Agreement DW 1393-5578-05

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Object Class</th>
<th>Unobligated Beginning Balance</th>
<th>Expended Appropriations (Cost Center 879-3401)</th>
<th>Net Unobligated Balance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sponsoring Division</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Division</td>
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<td>Fringe Benefits</td>
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<td>Matching Costs</td>
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<td>Overhead</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applied DE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applied OU</td>
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<td>Applied NIST</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>$170,320</td>
<td>$142,650</td>
<td>$27,670</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DE = Applied for Depreciation
OU = Applied for the Operating Unit
NIST = Applied for NIST Administration

In summary, we found that NIST properly accumulated, documented, and billed all of the Superfund work performed during fiscal year 1996 under the NIST/EPA Superfund agreement. Our findings, therefore, result in no recommendations for action by NIST.