A Message from the IRIS Program

On July 31, 2013, EPA announced enhancements to the IRIS Program to improve the scientific integrity of assessments and the productivity of the Program, and increase transparency so issues are identified and debated early in the process. As a part of these ongoing efforts to improve the IRIS process, the IRIS Program is introducing a new format to the bimonthly public meetings to improve the quality of the scientific discussions that occur.

In general, the IRIS public bimonthly meetings provide an opportunity for the public to participate in discussions on preliminary assessment materials or draft IRIS assessments. These science meetings are expected to be a dynamic and interactive supplement to the traditional practice of submitting written comments or making oral statements.

The December 2013 bimonthly public meeting was the first opportunity for stakeholders to comment on preliminary materials and draft assessments following the introduction of the enhancements in July 2013. The format allowed stakeholders to present on a variety of topics related to the IRIS Program for each chemical on the agenda. The IRIS Program found that this format resulted in the presentation of similar issues raised multiple times over the course of the two day meeting. Therefore, in an attempt to provide greater focus and more robust discussion on specific scientific issues, the IRIS Program will be introducing a new format during the April bimonthly meeting.

For the April meeting, the IRIS Program has identified several scientific issues for each chemical on the agenda. Individuals who register their interest in an issue will be given time to present their perspective, after which there will be time for a general discussion on the issue. We expect the presenters, other meeting participants, and IRIS scientists to engage in a robust and productive scientific discussion, and exchange information and perspectives on the science issues. The objective of this discussion is to ensure that the subsequent development of the draft IRIS assessments will reflect the most critical scientific issues and various perspectives on those issues.

To better facilitate participation and discussion, the IRIS staff has prepared preliminary materials that provide the key information that is expected to be important in the future development of the assessments. These materials include:

- A section on the scope of the assessment that explains why EPA is interested in the assessment and provides some background information on the chemical, its predominant uses, and the pathways through which humans can be exposed.
- The initial literature search strategy and the results of the literature search. If potentially important studies are missing, please let us know through written comments.
- Evidence tables that summarize key information on the design and results of pertinent scientific studies. Studies with serious flaws according to criteria discussed in EPA's guidelines (and summarized in the draft Preamble to the IRIS Toxicological Review) have been excluded. If additional selection criteria were applied to facilitate a more efficient

review of the evidence (for example, to highlight the most informative studies when there are a large number of studies on an effect), these criteria are explained in text accompanying the evidence tables. If potentially important studies are missing or if there are errors in the information extracted from a study, please let us know through written comments.

- Some key science issues that will be considered in the development of the assessments for diethyl phthalate (DEP) and hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD). The IRIS Program would like to promote wide public discussion on these key science issues. We encourage you to nominate additional science issues that you would like to join us in discussing at the meeting.

The IRIS Program has designed these preliminary materials to specifically convey factual information, presented mostly in tables, with only a preliminary evaluation of this information. Providing this factual information to all stakeholders at this point will make it possible for everyone to participate early in the assessment development process, prior to IRIS Program decisions regarding hazard identification and dose-response assessment.

As the IRIS Program continues to evolve, we will be evaluating how well our approaches promote constructive public discussion and facilitate subsequent assessment development. We expect to learn from this meeting and potentially modify the format of future meetings and the types of materials provided to further improve the transparency and efficiency of IRIS assessment development.

We understand that a strong, scientifically rigorous IRIS Program is of critical importance, and we believe that these changes to the format of the April bimonthly public meeting represent EPA's ongoing efforts to improve the quality of the scientific discussions that occur during public meetings.

We look forward to our scientific discussion in April!