



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) "Design for the Environment" (DfE) Safer Product Labeling Program to determine how effectively the program highlights safer products for consumer use.

For more than 15 years, the DfE Safer Product Labeling Program has labeled products that meet the criteria to be considered safer for families and the environment. According to the EPA, the DfE logo means that the product contains only those ingredients that pose the least concern among chemicals in their class. DfE products include car care products, carpet cleaners, dish and hand soaps, floor care products, laundry detergents, and glass cleaners.

The report addresses the following EPA goal or cross-agency strategy:

- *Ensuring the safety of chemicals and preventing pollution.*

Send all inquiries to our public affairs office at (202) 566-2391 or visit www.epa.gov/oig.

The full report is at: www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2014/20140909-14-P-0349.pdf

EPA Can Help Consumers Identify Household and Other Products with Safer Chemicals by Strengthening Its "Design for the Environment" Program

What We Found

We found that the current DfE logo does not adequately communicate to the consumer that the product is a safer product. We also found a risk that an EPA endorsement of DfE products may be implied by the current logo, but EPA endorsement is not allowed. The EPA also lacks sufficient controls over the use of its DfE logo by former program participants. This can be misleading for consumers and is a violation of the DfE partnership agreement.

Strengthened controls in the DfE program can help consumers better identify safer products.

We also found that the EPA asserts that DfE products are cost effective, but this has not been determined or reviewed. Further, there are weaknesses in both former and proposed performance measures used by the DfE program and the EPA cannot accurately determine the program's impact on pollution prevention.

Addressing the issues noted should further EPA goals, better promote safer products, and support DfE brand recognition among consumers.

Recommendations and Agency Planned Corrective Actions

We recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention improve the DfE logo, periodically review program participants' compliance with partnership agreements and address noncompliance with those agreements, remove statements on the EPA's website that imply that DfE products are cost effective, and improve performance measurement. The EPA agreed with our recommendations and proposed acceptable corrective actions. The agency fully addressed one recommendation and it is therefore closed, while the remaining recommendations are resolved with corrective actions underway.

Noteworthy Achievements

DfE has evaluated and approved more than 2,500 products to carry the DfE logo. The EPA updated the Safer Chemical Ingredients List in 2014, adding over 50 chemical ingredients and bringing the number of safer chemical ingredients to approximately 650. DfE has also developed a new database system that will enable the agency to better manage chemical, partner and product information in a cloud-based system.