



At a Glance

Why We Did This Project

We conducted this audit to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Scientific Integrity Policy is being implemented as intended to ensure SI throughout the EPA.

Specifically, we examined (1) the extent and type of employee SI concerns, (2) employee awareness of the SI Policy, (3) reasons potential violations might not be reported, and (4) the process by which the Agency responds to and resolves allegations of SI violations.

The EPA's SI Policy was released in February 2012 and covers an array of areas, from quality standards for scientific products to communication with the public. The SI Policy describes the expectation that all EPA employees will adhere to the terms of the Policy, including affirmatively reporting Policy breaches. The SI Policy also assigns specific responsibility for its implementation to the SI Committee, which is composed of members from all EPA regions and program offices.

This report addresses the following:

- *Improving EPA research programs.*

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Further Efforts Needed to Uphold Scientific Integrity Policy at EPA

What We Found

The results of our 2018 agencywide survey on SI—which received 4,320 responses (a 23.5 percent response rate)—showed that 3,987 respondents were aware of or had some familiarity with the SI Policy. Among those respondents with a basis to judge, the majority (56 percent; 1,025 of 1,842) were satisfied with the overall implementation of the EPA's SI Policy. The survey also revealed some concerns with specific aspects of SI at the EPA, including dissatisfaction with the EPA's culture of SI (59 percent; 1,425 of 2,402) and the release of scientific information to the public (57 percent; 1,049 of 1,842).

Improving implementation of the SI Policy will enable the EPA to more effectively carry out its mission to protect human health and the environment.

While our 2018 survey results provide only a snapshot in time, comparing them with the EPA's 2016 SI survey suggests areas that have improved and areas in need of improvement. Our 2018 survey results demonstrate higher levels of awareness of the SI Policy and how to report a potential SI violation. However, our survey revealed lower measures of perceived leadership support of SI and of satisfaction with the review and clearance of scientific documents.

Also, while the SI Committee, including the scientific integrity official, have implemented many Policy requirements and identified actions to improve SI at the EPA, we found that procedures to address potential violations were not finalized, mandatory training was not tracked, annual reporting was not timely, and the release of scientific products was not supported by a centralized clearance system. With improvements in these areas, the SI Committee could more consistently implement the SI Policy across the EPA.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the EPA's deputy administrator lead an effort to examine the causes associated with the SI concerns identified in our survey and communicate the results to Agency employees, including planned actions to address the causes. We also made 11 recommendations to the EPA science advisor, including developing procedures for addressing and resolving allegations of SI violations, communicating the outcomes of reports of SI violations, and improving the release of scientific information to the public.

The Agency agreed with our recommendations and provided acceptable corrective actions. Two recommendations have been completed, and the others are resolved with corrective actions pending.