

# Scientific Integrity at U.S. EPA

## Safeguarding Science to Protect Human Health and the Environment

### WHY is Scientific Integrity Important for EPA?

EPA's ability to protect human health and the environment depends upon the integrity of the science on which it relies. The EPA Scientific Integrity Policy provides both a vision and a roadmap for scientific integrity at the Agency. Issued in 2012, the Policy builds upon EPA's significant earlier scientific integrity efforts and addresses four areas:

- Promotion of a culture of scientific integrity at EPA;
- Release of scientific information to the public;
- Peer review and the use of federal advisory committees;
- Professional development of government scientists.

### WHO is Subject to EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy?

All EPA employees, including scientists, managers, and political appointees are required to follow the Scientific Integrity Policy when:

- Engaging in, supervising, managing, or influencing scientific activities;
- Communicating information in an official capacity about Agency scientific activities; and
- Utilizing scientific information in making Agency policy or management decisions.

In addition, all contractors, grantees, collaborators, and student volunteers of the Agency who engage in scientific activities are expected to uphold the standards established by the Policy.

### FROM the Policy

#### Promotion of a Culture of Scientific Integrity

- Fosters honest investigation, open discussion, refined understanding, and a firm commitment to evidence;
- Requires adherence to applicable Agency information quality, quality assurance, and peer review policies and procedures, ensuring that the Agency produces scientific products of the highest quality, rigor, and objectivity for use in policy decisions;
- Recognizes the distinction between scientific information, analyses, and results from the policy decisions made based on that scientific information;
- Prohibits all EPA employees, including scientists, managers, and other Agency leadership, from suppressing, altering, or otherwise impeding the timely release of scientific information;
- Requires all Agency employees to act honestly and refrain from acts of scientific misconduct;
- Facilitates the free flow of scientific information. EPA will expand and promote access to scientific information, including access to data and non-proprietary models underlying Agency policy decisions.
- Prohibits managers and Agency leadership from intimidating or coercing scientists to alter scientific data, findings, or professional opinions; and
- Requires adherence to Agency policies or procedures that address the use and characterization of scientific information in Agency policy development.

#### Release of Scientific Information to the Public

The Policy aims to foster a culture of transparency regarding the results of research, scientific activities, and technical findings. EPA encourages open communication, free from political or other interference. Under no circumstances should the public affairs staff attempt to alter or change scientific findings or results. The role of the public affairs officer is to ensure that the science is plainly and clearly communicated for the intended audiences in a timely fashion.

EPA scientists and managers are expected to:

- Review, correct, and approve the scientific content of any proposed Agency document intended for public dissemination that significantly relies on their research;
- Adhere to all Agency ethics regulations when conducting any types of outreach activity or media interaction; and
- Freely exercise their right to express their personal views provided that they specify that they are not speaking on behalf of, or as a representative of, the Agency, but rather in their personal private capacity with the use of a prominent and unmistakable disclaimer.

## Peer Review and the Use of Federal Advisory Committees

Independent peer review of Agency science is a crucial aspect of scientific integrity to:

- Ensure that scientific products undergo appropriate peer review by qualified experts, EPA relies on its Peer Review Policy and Handbook;
- Transparently recruit new FAC members through broad-based vacancy announcements; and
- Selection of members to serve on a scientific or technical FAC should be based on expertise, knowledge, contribution to the relevant subject area, balance of the scientific or technological points of view, and the consideration of conflicts of interest.

## Professional Development of Government Scientists

Scientific leadership advances the mission of EPA by:

- Encouraging Agency scientists to engage with their peers in academia, industry, government, and non-governmental organizations consistent with their work responsibilities; and
- Presenting research findings in scientific journals and at professional meetings, serving on editorial boards, and actively participating in professional societies, obtaining training to keep current with their scientific qualifications and professional certifications, and accruing professional awards and honors for their research discoveries in adherence with ethics regulations.

## HOW to Report a Scientific Integrity Allegation

Employees with a scientific integrity concern are encouraged to seek early advice from the Scientific Integrity Official or a Deputy Scientific Integrity Official. These officials can provide timely advice or assistance that may potentially prevent violations of the Policy. They may provide information or suggest preventative actions. If these officials are unable to assist in preventing or resolving a scientific integrity issue through early consultation, a person may submit a formal allegation.

Allegations of a loss of scientific integrity may be reported to the Scientific Integrity Official, any Deputy Scientific Integrity Official, or the Office of Inspector General (OIG). If the allegation concerns waste, fraud, or abuse or other criminal violations, the allegation would be referred to the OIG. If the allegation involves reprisal, it would be referred to the OIG or the Office of Special Counsel. If the allegation concerns a financial conflict of interest or other ethics issue involving federal employees, it would go to the appropriate Deputy Ethics Official or Office of General Counsel/Ethics, or Human Subjects Research Review Official, as appropriate.

The resolved allegations are summarized in our annual reports and on the Internet in a way that protects the identity of the parties involved. More information on the process for reporting and resolving an allegation can be found at <https://www.epa.gov/osa/basic-information-about-scientific-integrity>.

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Scientific Integrity Official

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