



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

PANDEMIC

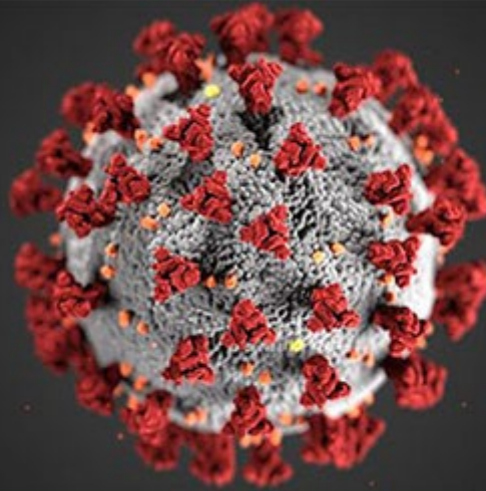


REPORT

As of December 3, 2020



EPA OIG's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic



Introduction

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Inspector General is continuing to meet the new challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic—that is, the SARS-CoV-2 virus and the resultant COVID-19 disease—by initiating audits, evaluations, and investigations related to the pandemic's impact on the EPA's and the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board's missions to protect people, public health, and the environment. We are examining and identifying how the pandemic has affected Agency programs and operations, from emergency responses for releases of hazardous substances to air quality enforcement to potential misconduct and criminal activity. We are working with our oversight partners, including other federal OIGs; the Pandemic Response Accountability Committee under the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency; and the U.S. Government Accountability Office, to coordinate our work and address matters of interagency or cross-jurisdictional concern.

Our office recognizes that we are facing unprecedented times and reinforces our commitment to conferring with congressional and Agency leadership; [issuing reports](#); and investigating waste, fraud, and abuse. We received no additional funding, yet we have undertaken a vigorous response.

Actual and Potential Subjects of Audits and Evaluations



- Enforcement and regulatory waivers and flexibilities.
- Fraud schemes taking advantage of the crisis by marketing unsafe and non-EPA-approved products to the public.
- Agency staffing shortfalls implicating oversight of critical environmental and public health programs.
- Agency return to work and employee health and safety upon reentry.
- Maintaining strong cyber and information technology protections while most of the workforce is teleworking.
- Ability of delegated state and tribal environmental programs to meet critical environmental and public health responsibilities.
- EPA's administration of CARES Act funding.

Pandemic-Related Reports and Recently Announced Projects



Listed in chronological order, starting with the most recent:

[Notification: Survey of Remedial Project Managers on the Impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Long-Term Cleanups at Superfund National Priorities List Sites](#)

December 1, 2020. The OIG plans to begin an evaluation to determine the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on long-term cleanup activities at Superfund National Priorities. Project #OE-FY21-0050

[Report: EPA's Initial Plans for Returning to the Office Incorporate CDC Guidance but Differ by Location](#)

November 30, 2020. The OIG sought to determine the EPA's national strategy for implementing federal guidelines to protect the health and safety of its workforce when reopening its locations that were closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. We found that the EPA's initial plans for returning to the office incorporate Centers for Disease Control guidance but differ by location. Report #21-E-0030

[Report: CSB Discontinued Information Recovery Testing and Off-Site Backup Storage During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#)

November 18, 2020. This report looked at instances where CSB lacks the information to make risk-based decisions for providing security of the agency's network during the coronavirus pandemic. The CSB was at risk of not being able to readily restore information technology

operations if they were disrupted during the coronavirus pandemic.
Report #21-E-0016

Notification: Coronavirus Pandemic Impact on EPA’s Ability to Conduct Laboratory Testing and Assure Compliance with Mobile Source Emission Standards

We will be examining “(1) how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted laboratory operations and testing at the EPA Office of Transportation and Air Quality’s National Vehicle and Fuel Emissions Laboratory in Ann Arbor, Michigan; and (2) any resulting impacts on EPA compliance programs designed to minimize potential for emissions in excess of standards, or non-compliance with regulations in heavy-duty, light-duty, and non-road vehicles, engines, and equipment compliance programs.”

Report: EPA Has Sufficiently Managed Emergency Responses During the Pandemic but Needs to Procure More Supplies and Clarify Guidance

September 28, 2020. We performed this evaluation to determine whether the EPA managed its resources for emergency responses to provide continued protection of human health and the environment during the coronavirus pandemic. On-scene coordinators may not be safe deploying during the COVID-19 pandemic without sufficient personal protective equipment and clear guidance. Report #20-E-0332

Report: EPA OIG's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

July 31, 2020. This report captures the EPA OIG’s early work to meet new challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, including audits, evaluations, and investigations. This work is related to the pandemic's impact on the EPA's and the CSB's missions, and on public health and the environment at the core of those missions.

Report: EPA's FYs 2020–2021 Top Management Challenges

July 21, 2020. Identifying and resolving top management challenges is essential to the EPA's protection of human health and the environment. The OIG identified maintaining human health and environmental protections, business operations, and employee safety during the coronavirus pandemic, among others, as a top management challenge. Report #20-N-0231

Report: Fiscal Year 2020 U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board Management Challenges

July 6, 2020. Unaddressed management challenges will impede the ability of the CSB to function effectively. The OIG has identified the continuation of operations during the coronavirus pandemic as a top management challenge, among others, for the CSB. Report #20-N-0218

Report: EPA's Initial Implementation of CARES Act Section 3610

June 29, 2020. The Office of Acquisition Solutions created and provided detailed guidance to EPA contracting personnel and contractors related to reimbursements under Section 3610 of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, known as the CARES Act. Report #20-N-0202

Top Pandemic-Related Challenges Facing the EPA

June 17, 2020. The OIG has identified initial challenges to the EPA's ability to achieve its mission, including enforcement and fraud risks; state, tribe, and territory program implementation; and risk communication to the public. The OIG also identified internal challenges to maintaining a safe and productive workforce, including returning to work safely, effective remote technology, understanding organizational risk, and contract oversight.

Notification: Internal Controls Established to Implement Programs and Activities Funded under the CARES Act

June 10, 2020. The OIG is conducting an evaluation concerning internal controls established for programs and activities funded under the CARES Act. Project #OA&E-FY20-0234

Notification: EPA's Oversight of Tribal Drinking Water Systems

May 29, 2020. The OIG is conducting an evaluation of the EPA's oversight of tribal drinking water systems, including how that oversight has been affected by the coronavirus pandemic.
Project #OA&E-FY20-0044

Notification: Research for Future Audits and Evaluations Regarding Effects of Coronavirus Pandemic (SARS-CoV-2 Virus and COVID-19 Disease) on EPA Programs and Operations

May 7, 2020. The OIG has initiated an overall project to research and identify topics for potential audits and evaluations related to the EPA's response to the coronavirus pandemic. Project #OA&E-FY20-0212

Notification: Evaluation of EPA's Information Systems' Compliance with Federal System Security Plans Requirements (2nd notification)

May 6, 2020. One objective of this audit is to evaluate elements within the EPA's System Security Plans to determine whether they provide sufficient details to allow the EPA to make decisions regarding network security during the coronavirus pandemic. Project #OA&E-FY20-0176

Notification: FY 2020 EPA's Compliance with the Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014

May 5, 2020. The OIG is assessing the EPA's compliance with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's fiscal year 2020 Inspector General Federal Information Security Modernization Act Reporting Metrics and the relevant impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.
Project #OA&E-FY20-0033

Potential Investigation Targets



We take seriously our obligation to investigate fraud related to the coronavirus pandemic. We are particularly committed to investigating schemes involving potential criminal activity or misconduct that impacts the American people or thwarts the EPA's ability to fulfill its mission, as well as to investigating conduct that relies on, takes advantage of, or exploits a weakness or vulnerability in an EPA program or operation.

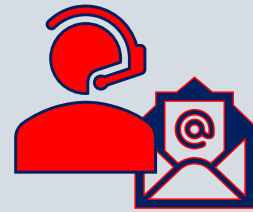
Types of Investigations OIG is Undertaking or May Undertake

- Fraud schemes relating to the EPA's programs and operations.
- Fraudulent claims for money that should be spent to advance an EPA program.
- Improper avoidance of obligations to pay as required by an EPA program.
- Misrepresentations of the EPA's endorsement of COVID disinfectant or other products by fraudulently applying the Agency seal, identifier, or product registration numbers to product labels or advertisements.
- Cyberscams targeting EPA employees, contractors, and grantees as well as security threats to the EPA.

Learn more about our [investigative COVID-19 response](#) or [contact the OIG Hotline](#).

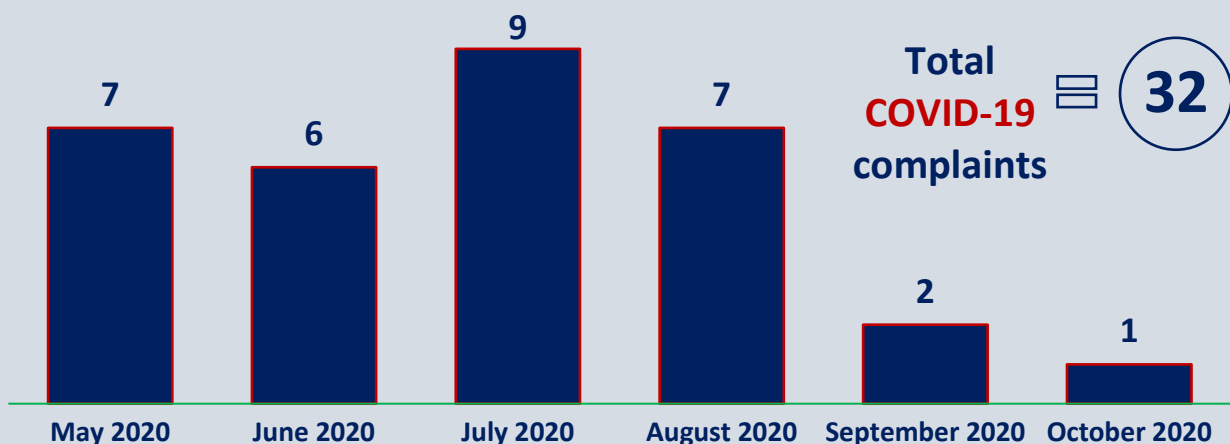
EPA OIG Hotline

Our office [receives allegations](#) of fraud, waste, and abuse concerning the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on EPA and CSB operations.

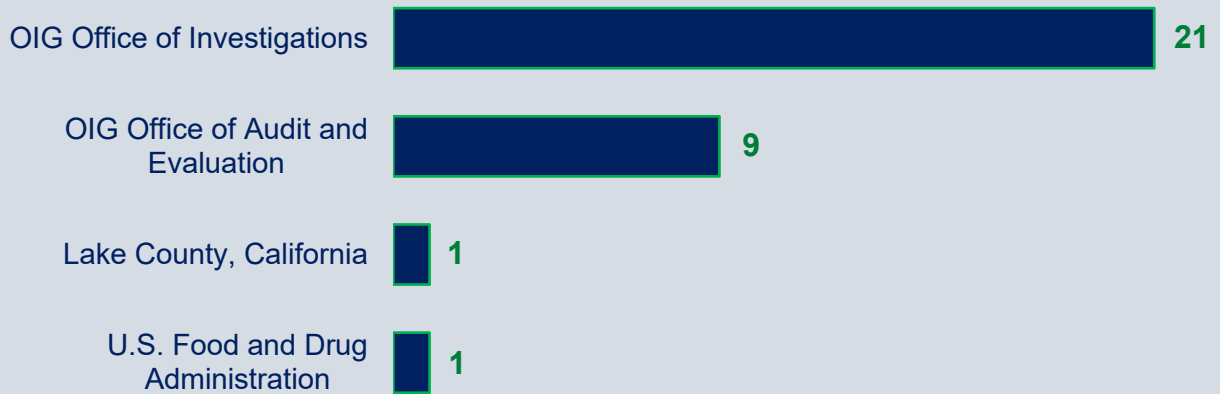


- Beware of companies placing the EPA seal or an EPA registration number on their products claiming that they meet EPA standards.
- Be cautious of imported products marketed as proven to effectively block various epidemic viruses.
- Be on the lookout for websites claiming their products contain EPA-approved active ingredients that kill 99.9% of all viruses and bacteria, including SAR-CoV-2 virus. These companies may put the EPA logo on their websites to legitimize products. For a list of EPA-approved disinfectants, please visit EPA Official List N: Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-CoV-2.
- Be wary of companies claiming that their services are endorsed or their equipment or material is certified by the EPA.

Complaints Related to COVID-19



Where COVID-19-Related Complaints Were Referred



Prior OIG Reports Relevant to EPA's Handling of Emergencies and Disasters

[Report: Management Alert - To Minimize Risk of Environmental Harm, the Security Categorization of Electronic Manifest System Data Needs to Be Re-Evaluated](#)

[Report: EPA Needs to Improve Its Risk Management and Incident Response Information Security Functions](#)

[Report: CSB's Information Security Program Is Defined, but Improvements Needed in Risk Management, Identity and Access Management, and Incident Response](#)

[View More Prior OIG Reports Relevant to the EPA's Handling of Emergencies And Disasters →](#)

Related Resources

- [Coronavirus.gov](#)
- [EPA's resources related to COVID-19](#)
- [CIGIE's Pandemic Response Accountability Committee](#)