



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

May 5, 2023

OFFICE OF
THE ADMINISTRATOR

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Response to Office of Inspector General (OIG) Report No. 23-E-0013, *The EPA's January 2021 PFBS Toxicity Assessment Did Not Uphold the Agency's Commitments to Scientific Integrity and Information Quality*, dated March 7, 2023

FROM: Dan Utech
Chief of Staff
Office of the Administrator

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TO: Sean W. O'Donnell
Inspector General
Office of Inspector General

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Office of Inspector General's (OIG's) report titled, *The EPA's January 2021 PFBS Toxicity Assessment Did Not Uphold the Agency's Commitments to Scientific Integrity and Information Quality* (Report No. 23-E-0013).

As stated in the response to the draft report with the same title, EPA appreciates the OIG's attention to the events that occurred between October 2020 and January 19, 2021, which culminated in the release of the January 2021 PFBS toxicity assessment. EPA also appreciates the OIG's careful consideration of EPA's technical comments on the draft report and the changes made by the OIG to improve the description of events that occurred between October 2020 and January 2021.

It is important to highlight the areas of agreement between EPA and the OIG. In particular, EPA agrees that the Agency, under the direction of the previous administration's political leadership, did not follow established policies and procedures between October 2020 and January 19, 2021. EPA also agrees that altering the October 2020 draft PFBS toxicity assessment, as directed by the previous administration's political leadership, was a violation of the EPA's scientific integrity policy. Most importantly, EPA agrees that these actions harmed the public's trust in the integrity of EPA's science. Public trust in EPA's science is essential to the Agency's ability to fulfill its mission of protecting human health and the environment. Under the Biden Administration, EPA is committed to restoring the public's trust in government through scientific integrity and science-based decision making.

The OIG report asserts that updating policies, procedures, and technical documents will help restore public trust in EPA's decision-making and ensure that EPA disseminates sound, high-quality scientific documents. This conclusion assumes, however, that these policies, procedures, and technical documents were flawed and that—by themselves—they are able to prevent political interference in the conduct, management, communication, and use of science. Consistent with EPA's response to the draft OIG report, the Agency disagrees with these assumptions. Policies, procedures, and technical documents did not prevent political appointees, or career staff acting under the direction of such appointees, from altering and releasing the altered PFBS toxicity assessment on January 19, 2021, because those political appointees willfully chose not to follow EPA's scientific integrity policy, quality program, and the established intra-agency review and clearance processes. Consequently, EPA continues to disagree with the recommendations included in the OIG report.

Restoring public trust in EPA's science requires the Agency to focus on the root cause of the events that led to the release of the January 2021 PFBS toxicity assessment—political interference in EPA science—and work to discourage such activities from occurring in the future. As stated in EPA's previous response, effectively preventing political interference in Agency science requires different actions than those recommended by the OIG. Therefore, we will notify EPA's Office of the Chief Financial Officer of our interest in elevating these issues.

If you have any questions regarding this memorandum, please contact Kristopher Laub, Office of Research and Development, Office of Resource Management, at 919-514-6701.

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