



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Research and Development (ORD) has adequate controls over research equipment utilized for decision-making.

Science provides the foundation for credible decision-making. As the scientific research arm of the EPA, ORD uses sensitive and often expensive equipment. ORD's reported capital equipment totals nearly \$73 million. Property management regulations require that agencies identify and reassign any idle equipment and maintain adequate inventory controls and accountability systems. We reviewed usage of a sample of 99 pieces of scientific equipment in three national laboratories.

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

- *Embracing EPA as a high-performing organization.*

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The full report is at: www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2015/20150316-15-P-0115.pdf

To Ensure Greater Use of Scientific Equipment, the Office of Research and Development Should Use an Enterprise Approach to Property Management

What We Found

Our review of a sample of research equipment within three laboratories found that approximately 30 percent (or 30 of 99 pieces) had not been used for 2 to 14 years, and 6 percent (or six of 99 pieces) were obsolete. Equipment used for air and water research sat idle either because there was no

ongoing research necessitating its use or because it was being kept as backup equipment. Laboratories did not comply with federal property regulations, which require equipment inspection walkthroughs every 2 years and the creation of equipment pools to maximize the use of idle equipment and identify obsolete pieces.

The EPA does not manage its scientific equipment as a business unit or enterprise. ORD managers and staff are not aware of federal property management requirements. While ORD established the position of a National Asset Manager, ORD has not created a comprehensive, officewide scientific equipment list that would make ORD's resources visible throughout the agency for key research decision-making. Additionally, ORD does not have clear lines of authority for equipment accountability and usage. Program risks exist as a result, including valuable scientific equipment sitting idle when there might be a demand for it elsewhere in ORD or the agency. Additionally, ORD could waste funds by purchasing duplicative research equipment. To minimize risks, ORD should ensure compliance with applicable federal property regulations. Better property management would aid decision-making on the use of and need for risk management and exposure research equipment, and would position ORD to rethink its equipment from an enterprise perspective.

By not effectively managing property, 30 percent of a sample of scientific equipment sat idle in three laboratories.

Recommendations and Planned Corrective Actions

We recommend that the Assistant Administrator for ORD develop an ORD equipment list, create an equipment pool, establish regular equipment utilization walkthroughs, and conduct independent reviews of equipment procedures. We also recommend that the Assistant Administrator define the role and authority of the National Asset Manager, and excess obsolete equipment identified during our site visits. ORD suggested additional wording for our first recommendation, which we accepted. ORD agreed with all recommendations, which are resolved and open with corrective actions pending.

Agency Actions Prompted by OIG Work

ORD's National Asset Manager started developing an ORD-wide list of capital equipment, and two laboratories started identifying idle equipment to excess.