

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; and
- Professional development of government scientists.

WHO is Subject to EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy?

The Scientific Integrity Policy applies to EPA employees, contractors, grantees, collaborators and volunteers who supervise, manage, or influence scientific activities, and those who communicate or utilize scientific information.

FROM the Policy

Promotion of a Culture of Scientific Integrity

To support a culture of scientific integrity within the Agency, the policy:

- 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 from suppressing, altering, or otherwise impeding the timely release of scientific findings;
- Requires all Agency employees to act honestly and refrain from acts of scientific misconduct;
- Requires EPA to expand and promote access to scientific information, including access to data and non-proprietary models underlying Agency policy decisions;
- Prohibits Agency leadership from intimidating or coercing scientists to alter scientific data, findings or professional opinions; and
- Requires adherence to Agency documents 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.

- EPA scientists and managers are expected to:
- 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 private capacity with the use of a prominent and unmistakable disclaimer; and

- Review, correct, and approve the scientific content of any proposed Agency document intended for public dissemination that significantly relies on their research.
- Outreach activities and media interactions are expected to adhere to Agency ethics regulations.
- 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 audience in a timely fashion.

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.
- Transparent recruitment of new FAC members through broad based vacancy announcements
- The 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 is a key component of advancing the mission of EPA.

- Agency scientists are encouraged to engage with their peers in academia, industry, government, and non-governmental organizations consistent with their work responsibilities.
- This includes 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. Professional activities are expected to adhere to Agency ethics regulations.

HOW to Report a Scientific Integrity Allegation

Allegations of a loss of scientific integrity may be reported to the Scientific Integrity Official, any Deputy Scientific Integrity Official in a program or regional office, 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 work we do together to preserve the integrity of our science is as critical as ever...With science as our North Star – EPA has steered America away from health risks, and toward healthier communities and a higher overall quality of life.”

– EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy • April 28, 2014

<http://www.epa.gov/scientificintegrity>

Scientific Integrity Official

Francesca T. Grifo, Ph.D.
grifo.francesca@epa.gov

Scientific Integrity Program Lead

Martha J. Otto
otto.martha@epa.gov