



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review to determine the outcomes of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Voluntary Children's Chemical Evaluation Program (VCCEP) toward meeting its original goal and the goals outlined under the Chemical Right-to-Know Initiative (ChemRTK).

Background

Executive Order (EO) 13045 directed federal agencies to place a high priority on protecting children from environmental and safety risks. The goal of the 1998 ChemRTK was to give citizens information on the effects of chemicals to enable them to make informed choices in the home and marketplace. ChemRTK satisfied EO 13045 by directing EPA to undertake testing on chemicals to which children are disproportionately exposed. EPA accordingly established the VCCEP pilot.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional, Public Affairs and Management at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2011/20110721-11-P-0379.pdf

EPA's Voluntary Chemical Evaluation Program Did Not Achieve Children's Health Protection Goals

What We Found

The VCCEP pilot did not achieve its goals to design a process to assess and report on the safety of chemicals to children. The pilot's design did not allow for desired outcomes to be produced. Specifically, the pilot had a flawed chemical selection process and lacked an effective communication strategy. Programmatic effectiveness was hampered by industry partners who chose not to voluntarily collect and submit information, and EPA's decision not to exercise its regulatory authorities under the Toxic Substances Control Act to compel data collection. EPA has not demonstrated that it can achieve children's health goals with a voluntary program. The VCCEP is no longer operational, and the Agency has no plans to revive, replace, or terminate the program. As a result, the Agency is not meeting the intent of EO 13045, ChemRTK, or the VCCEP pilot, and there remains no readily understandable source of chemical exposure information that the general public can access to determine potential risks to children.

What We Recommend

We recommend that EPA design and implement a new process to assess the safety of chemicals to children that (1) identifies the chemicals with highest potential risk to children, (2) applies the Toxic Substances Control Act regulatory authorities as appropriate for data collection, (3) interprets results and disseminates information to the public, and (4) includes outcome measures that assure valid and timely results.

The Agency concurred with our findings, indicating that work ongoing by the existing chemicals program addresses many of our concerns. EPA agreed with our recommendations related to improving its chemical selection process and developing performance measures for children's health protection. EPA did not explicitly agree to develop a workable data collection strategy for applying Toxic Substances Control Act regulatory authorities or a communications strategy for public information dissemination, but provided information on the program's current activities. Also, no target dates were provided by which to assess the completion of EPA's actions taken to address our recommendations.