



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this special review to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took disciplinary action on employee misconduct cases identified by Office of Inspector General (OIG) Reports of Investigation; and if the disciplinary action taken was timely, appropriate, and in accordance with established guidelines. We looked at cases closed between October 1, 2002, and September 30, 2006.

Background

Many jobs at EPA require employees to deal with the public. EPA employees also manage, control, and oversee Federal funds as well as sensitive and confidential data. EPA employees must maintain the highest standards of conduct as representatives of the Agency. Failure to deal quickly and decisively with violations of these standards undermines the confidence the public will have in the Agency.

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

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2007/20070507-2007-M-00003.pdf

EPA Needs to Respond More Timely to Reports of Investigation

What We Found

While EPA took disciplinary action where deemed appropriate, it did not take the actions timely. EPA policies require the Agency to initiate disciplinary actions within 30 days from the date the Office of Inspector General's Office of Investigations issues a Report of Investigation. However, EPA took an average of almost 200 days to do so. According to several EPA action officials, EPA may not take disciplinary action within 30 days because the Agency cannot complete the process recommended in the EPA Disciplinary Process Handbook within 30 days. EPA officials noted they are often uneasy in dealing with the sensitive issues involved, and union involvement can also cause delays. Further, EPA officials said it would be helpful if the Office of Investigations did followup on the status of pending actions and provided reminders.

For six cases we reviewed, the Agency did not take disciplinary actions that were severe enough considering the nature of the misconduct. For example, EPA only gave an oral admonishment to an employee who was absent without authorization for over 400 hours. Another employee, who pled guilty in court to using a credit card stolen from another Federal agency for personal purchases, only received a letter of reprimand. A third employee, who pled guilty to bank fraud and was sentenced to a day in jail and 5 years probation, had a 45-day suspension recommended by the employee's supervisor reduced by the action official to 14 days.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the EPA Deputy Administrator:

1. Re-evaluate the 30-day reporting requirement to consider a timeframe more in line with the length of time necessary to accomplish EPA's disciplinary process.
2. In cases when the Agency is unable to meet established timeframes, provide an action plan that includes any interim action taken to minimize the risks of continued misconduct pending final disciplinary action.
3. Assure that disciplinary actions taken in employee integrity and misconduct cases are sufficient and appropriate.

The Agency generally agreed with our recommendations, although we would like to see the Agency make more of a commitment to dealing with employee misconduct.