



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We analyzed internal guidance used by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) program and regional offices for interacting with the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to determine whether the guidance was (1) applied consistently Agency-wide, or (2) included procedures that included burdensome administrative requirements or allowed screening of information prior to issuance to the OIG.

Background

The Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance instructed its managers not to provide information directly to the OIG. However, the Inspector General Act of 1978 authorizes federal inspectors general to assess information and personnel relative to program operations of federal agencies. EPA's own policy also endorses OIG access to personnel and timely information.

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

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2009/20090825-09-P-0222.pdf

Office of Inspector General Access to Agency Information and Personnel

What We Found

At the time of our review, EPA did not have consistent overall guidance governing interaction with the OIG. Consequently, some EPA program and regional offices promulgated internal guidance that impeded OIG access to Agency information and personnel. These internal guidances included procedures with burdensome administrative requirements that allowed EPA managers to screen and potentially change information prior to issuing the information to the OIG. Others required personnel to seek supervisory guidance before responding to OIG inquiries.

Our Agency-wide survey found that EPA employees had a significant lack of knowledge about interacting with the OIG. Eighty-three percent of respondents either were not aware or did not know of any guidance or procedures governing interaction with the OIG. Fourteen percent of the respondents believed they may face retribution if they provided information or documents to the OIG without permission from a supervisor. An additional 31 percent did not know whether they would face retribution if they provided documents or information to the OIG without permission.

Corrective Actions Taken

We recommended that the Deputy Administrator issue guidance to all EPA program and regional offices on interacting with the OIG to ensure unfettered access to information and personnel; and that all lower level guidance, written or unwritten, be revoked. In response, the EPA Administrator issued prescriptive guidance on August 7, 2009, to address these issues. The guidance instructed EPA personnel to provide OIG auditors, evaluators, and investigators with full and unrestricted access to personnel, facilities, records, or other information or material needed by the OIG to accomplish its mission. The EPA Administrator defined unrestricted access to mean that managers and staff are not to impose burdensome administrative requirements or screening procedures that could impede OIG access to needed employees and materials. The EPA Administrator instructed all EPA offices to review their policies and procedures related to interaction with the OIG and conform to her guidance by September 4, 2009. The OIG believes the actions taken by the Administrator to be sufficient to address the draft recommendation. Since the actions were taken prior to issuance of our final report, no further action is necessary.