



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this audit in response to a request by the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space, and Technology for information about the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) practices when using private and alias email accounts to conduct official business.

The EPA's records management program is managed through the agency's National Records Management Program. The agency's records officer, located within the Office of Environmental Information, is responsible for leading the program in accordance with EPA policy, procedures, and federal statutes and regulations.

This report addresses the following EPA theme:

- *Embracing EPA as a high performing organization.*

For further information, contact our public affairs office at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2013/20130926-13-P-0433.pdf

Congressionally Requested Inquiry Into the EPA's Use of Private and Alias Email Accounts

What We Found

We found no evidence that the EPA used, promoted or encouraged the use of private "non-governmental" email accounts to circumvent records management responsibilities or reprimanded, counseled or took administrative actions against personnel for using private email or alias accounts for conducting official government business. EPA senior officials said they were aware of the agency records management policies and, based only on discussions with these senior officials, the OIG found no evidence that these individuals had used private email to circumvent federal recordkeeping responsibilities.

The previous EPA Administrator and the then Acting EPA Administrator who followed were issued two EPA email accounts. One account was made available to the public to communicate with the EPA Administrator and the other was used to communicate internally with EPA personnel. This was the common practice for previous Administrators. The practice is widely used within the agency and is not limited to senior EPA officials. These secondary EPA email accounts present risks to records management efforts if they are not searched to preserve federal records.

The agency recognizes it is not practical to completely eliminate the use of private email accounts. However, the agency had not provided guidance on preserving records from private email accounts. The EPA has not implemented oversight processes to ensure locations provide consistent and regular training on records management responsibilities, and employees complete available training on their delegated National Records Management Program duties. Inconsistencies in employee out-processing procedures pose risks that federal records are not identified and preserved before an employee departs the agency. EPA also lacks an automated tool to create federal records from its new email system.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the assistant administrator for the Office of Environmental Information develop and implement oversight processes to update agency guidance on the use of private email accounts, train employees and contractors on records management responsibilities, strengthen relationships between federal records preservation and employee out processing, and deliver a system to create federal records from the new system. The EPA concurred with many of our recommendations but did ask that we clarify aspects of two findings. The agency has either completed recommended actions or plans to take corrective actions to address our findings.

Noteworthy Achievements

EPA created a records policy to provide guidance to personnel regarding roles and responsibilities for records management. In fiscal year 2009, the EPA declared electronic content management an agency-level weakness. In its fiscal year 2012 Agency Financial Report, the EPA cited as part of its corrective action plan that it launched two pilot projects to evaluate tools for eDiscovery and the management of email records. Over the past 4 years, the EPA has taken various actions to close out this agency-level weakness.