



At a Glance

Why We Did This Project

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Inspector General conducted this audit to determine whether the Safer Choice program effectively meets its goals and whether the program achieves quality standards through its product qualification, renewal, and required audit processes.

The Safer Choice program is a voluntary program designed to prevent pollution by working with manufacturers, retailers, nongovernmental organizations, and other stakeholders to encourage the use of safer chemicals in products. All certified Safer Choice products must provide full ingredient disclosure, meet criteria established by the EPA, and undergo regular audits conducted by third-party profilers. TPPs are responsible for conducting on-site audits, desk audits, and renewal audits to ensure program and label compliance for all Safer Choice partners and products.

This report addresses the following:

- *Ensuring the safety of chemicals.*

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EPA's Safer Choice Program Would Benefit from Formal Goals and Additional Oversight

What We Found

The EPA's Safer Choice program does not have formal goals included in the *FY 2018–2022 U.S. EPA Strategic Plan*, and the program has not reported results for fiscal years 2018–2019. However, the program does have internal, non-outcome-oriented goals, which it is generally achieving. The Safer Choice program's goal is to add 200 Safer Choice products to the program and 25 chemicals to the Safer Chemical Ingredients List each year. In FY 2019, the Agency added 265 products and 24 chemicals. By not including formal goals for the Safer Choice program in Agency reports while continuing to receive congressional funding and support, the EPA limits not only accountability to Congress and the public, but also the extent that the program can use performance management information to make policy, budget, and management decisions.

Enhancements in the Safer Choice audit process will ensure that consumers and businesses are purchasing products that are safer for people and the environment.

The EPA's Safer Choice program has general controls in place for the required Safer Choice audit process. The EPA reviews audit summaries and corrective actions provided by TPPs. However, the Agency does not routinely review all supporting documentation, relying on TPPs to review and retain these documents. Additionally, the Safer Choice program does not have procedures in place to conduct any formal performance reviews of TPPs or oversight reviews of TPP partner audits. Without periodic audit oversight, including full reviews of supporting documents and formal performance reviews of TPPs, the EPA risks approving products that do not comply with the Safer Choice Standard.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the assistant administrator for Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention develop and publish adequate Safer Choice program goals and performance measures, establish and implement procedures for formal audit oversight of TPPs, amend its memorandums of understanding with TPPs to require performance reviews conducted by the EPA, and collect and document TPP audit supporting information.

The EPA did not provide acceptable planned corrective actions for two recommendations, and we consider these recommendations unresolved. For three recommendations, the Agency provided acceptable planned corrective actions, and we consider these recommendations resolved with corrective actions pending.