



# At a Glance

## Why We Did This Audit

We received four congressional requests regarding actions by Regions 5 and 6 to address ethylene oxide emissions. In response, we conducted this audit to address:

- Whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency complied with all statutory, regulatory, and policy requirements and protocols in disclosing public health information about ethylene oxide emissions from three facilities in Illinois.
- Whether EPA senior political appointees instructed EPA inspectors to avoid conducting inspections at ethylene oxide-emitting facilities across Regions 5 and 6.
- Whether the EPA has conducted inspections at ethylene oxide-emitting facilities in Regions 5 and 6.

In December 2016, the EPA revised its characterization of ethylene oxide to “carcinogenic to humans.”

### This audit addresses the following:

- *Improving air quality.*

### This audit addresses a top EPA management challenge:

- *Communicating risks.*

Address inquiries to our public affairs office at (202) 566-2391 or [OIG\\_WEBCOMMENTS@epa.gov](mailto:OIG_WEBCOMMENTS@epa.gov).

List of [OIG reports](#).

## ***EPA Delayed Risk Communication and Issued Instructions Hindering Region 5’s Ability to Address Ethylene Oxide Emissions***

### What We Found

The EPA delayed communicating health risks to community residents in Illinois, which is part of EPA Region 5, who lived near ethylene oxide-emitting facilities. Specifically, Office of Air and Radiation leadership delayed informing the Willowbrook, Illinois, community about the results of the EPA’s May 2018 short-term monitoring around the Sterigenics facility and did not conduct public meetings with residents either near the Medline facility in Waukegan, Illinois, or the Vantage facility in Gurnee, Illinois. Outside of the residual risk review process, the Office of Inspector General did not identify any statutory, regulatory, or specific policy requirements or protocols to disclose public health information about ethylene oxide emissions. The EPA’s mission statement and risk communication guidance state, however, that communities should have accurate information to participate in decision-making processes.

**The EPA did not achieve its mission when senior leaders issued instructions to Region 5 that impacted the region’s ability to address ethylene oxide emissions and when the EPA delayed communicating health risks regarding ethylene oxide.**

According to two Region 5 managers, a then-senior leader in the Office of Air and Radiation, who was a political appointee, instructed Region 5 to not conduct inspections at ethylene oxide-emitting facilities unless invited by the state to conduct a joint inspection. Region 6 managers and inspectors stated that they did not receive such policy instructions. Office of Air and Radiation senior leaders also issued additional instructions that hindered Region 5’s ability to effectively address ethylene oxide emissions, according to Region 5 personnel.

The EPA delegates authority to state, local, and tribal agencies to implement federal environmental programs. The states in Regions 5 and 6 generally inspected major and synthetic minor facilities that emit ethylene oxide from fiscal years 2018 through 2020, according to the frequencies outlined in the EPA’s 2016 *Clean Air Act Stationary Source Compliance Monitoring Strategy* or a state’s alternative Clean Air Act CMS plan.

### Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the assistant administrator for Air and Radiation develop standard operating procedures describing the roles and responsibilities of the Office of Air and Radiation and EPA regional offices in assessing and addressing air toxics emissions and how the Office of Air and Radiation will work with regional offices to communicate preliminary air toxics risk information to the public. The Agency’s response to the draft report stated that its air toxics strategy would address these recommendations. We reviewed the draft air toxics strategy, and it did not address our concerns. We consider the two recommendations unresolved.