



At a Glance

Why We Did This Evaluation

We performed this evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's policies and procedures in addressing stakeholder risks in the 2016 and 2018 dicamba pesticide registration decisions.

The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act, or FIFRA, charges the EPA with balancing the uncertainties and risks posed by a pesticide against the benefits associated with the use of the pesticide. The EPA's Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention, or OCSPP, can conditionally register new uses of a pesticide if the Agency finds that the pesticide meets the standard for registration, but there is a need to collect additional monitoring data or conduct new scientific studies.

This evaluation addresses the following:

- *Ensuring the safety of chemicals.*

This evaluation addresses a top EPA [management challenge](#):

- *Communicating risks.*

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List of [OIG reports](#).

EPA Deviated from Typical Procedures in Its 2018 Dicamba Pesticide Registration Decision

What We Found

The EPA's *Scientific Integrity Policy* affirms that the Agency's ability to pursue its mission to protect human health and the environment depends upon the integrity of the science on which the EPA relies. Per the policy, the EPA's scientists and managers are expected to represent the Agency's scientific activities clearly, accurately, honestly, objectively, thoroughly, without political or other interference, and in a timely manner, consistent with their official responsibilities. Additionally, federal and EPA requirements include documenting the formulation and execution of policies and decisions. For pesticide registration decisions, the OCSPP's Office of Pesticide Programs must review registrations and document its decisions.

The EPA needs to document and follow established procedures to ensure scientifically sound decisions regarding pesticides.

We found that the EPA's 2018 decision to extend registrations for three dicamba pesticide products varied from typical operating procedures. Namely, the EPA did not conduct the required internal peer reviews of scientific documents created to support the dicamba decision. While division-level management review is part of the typical operating procedure, interviewees said that senior leaders in the OCSPP's immediate office were more involved in the dicamba decision than in other pesticide registration decisions. This led to senior-level changes to or omissions from scientific documents. For instance, these documents excluded some conclusions initially assessed by staff scientists to address stakeholder risks. We also found that staff felt constrained or muted in sharing their concerns on the dicamba registrations. The EPA's actions on the dicamba registrations left the decision legally vulnerable, resulting in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals vacating the 2018 registrations for violating FIFRA by substantially understating some risks and failing to acknowledge others entirely.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the assistant administrator for Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention (1) implement a procedure requiring senior managers or policy makers to document changes or alterations to scientific opinions, analyses, and conclusions in interim and final pesticide registration decisions and their basis for such changes or alterations; (2) require an assistant administrator-level verification statement that *Scientific Integrity Policy* requirements were reviewed and adhered to during pesticide registration decisions that involve the immediate office; and (3) annually conduct and document training for all staff and senior managers and policy makers to affirm the office's commitment to the *Scientific Integrity Policy* and principles and to promote a culture of scientific integrity. Two recommendations are resolved with corrective actions pending, and one recommendation is unresolved.