

# News Release



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## **EPA Office of Inspector General Alerts Administrator to Employees on Extended Periods of Administrative Leave** *8 staff paid not to work nearly 21,000 hours cost taxpayers more than \$1 million*

**WASHINGTON** – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA’s) Office of Inspector General (OIG) today released an early warning report alerting EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy to the fact that employees were on extended periods of administrative leave through fiscal year 2014 – in some cases for several years.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report titled *Federal Paid Administrative Leave, Additional Guidance Needed to Improve OPM Data* on October 17, 2014, for which records from the EPA, among other agencies, were reviewed. In reaction, a member of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary and a member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform sent a letter to Administrator McCarthy October 21 requesting information about EPA employees and administrative leave. That letter prompted this OIG report.

During a broader and still ongoing audit of EPA time and attendance issues, the OIG reviewed a sample of employees, finding that eight employees were on administrative leave for at least four months. Half of those individuals were on administrative leave for more than a year. Three had been on administrative leave status for several years. The total amount of administrative leave recorded for the eight employees totaled 20,926 hours. Multiplied by their pay rates, the cost to the government – and the taxpayers – was an estimated \$1,096,868.

In the federal government, the term “administrative leave” refers to excused absence without loss of pay or charge to personal leave hours. The purpose of an early warning report is to quickly provide to the agency significant, time-critical information obtained during an audit that is still in progress. Any recommendations that the OIG may have for EPA management will be included in a final report after the audit is completed.

**- more -**

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“Obviously, paying the salaries of federal employees not to work – especially for extended periods of time – raises flags of common concern for GAO, the Congress and an Office of Inspector General,” said Inspector General Arthur A. Elkins. “It is important to assist the EPA’s Administrator by bringing this alarming situation to her attention now, as auditors are uncovering it, rather than to wait until their entire review of time and attendance has concluded.”

OIG auditors, in examining data from a longer period of time, identified significantly higher amounts of administrative leave recorded for sampled EPA employees than were reported by GAO. They also cited an additional concern: the use of dubious other pay categories by the EPA in conjunction with administrative leave.

As the ongoing audit examines time and attendance issues in fiscal year 2014, the current status of the employees identified in this report as having been on administrative leave is unknown.

Read this early warning report at <http://go.usa.gov/sQaW> and listen to a podcast about it at <http://go.usa.gov/snfR>.

The OIG is an independent office within the EPA that performs audits, program evaluations and investigations of the EPA and the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board, and their contractors, and prevents and detects fraud, waste and abuse. By helping the EPA and CSB operate more economically, effectively and efficiently, the OIG contributes to improved environmental quality and human health. The OIG strives to provide solutions to problems that ultimately result in making America a cleaner and healthier place. For more information, visit <http://www.epa.gov/oig> and follow the OIG on Twitter at @EPAoig (<https://twitter.com/EPAoig>).

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