



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) is conducting an audit to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) completed required background investigations for contractor personnel with privileged access to EPA information systems. While the audit is ongoing, we are issuing this management alert to make the EPA aware of certain issues that need immediate attention.

Background investigations are required for all individuals to be employed or contracted by the federal government. Background investigations are particularly critical for information security personnel in high-risk positions as they develop, implement and administer the system's security controls to resist and identify cybersecurity threats.

This report addresses the following:

- *Operating efficiently and effectively.*

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Management Alert: EPA Has Not Initiated Required Background Investigations for Information Systems Contractor Personnel

What We Found

The required background investigation was not initiated for any of the nine contractor personnel we reviewed prior to their obtaining privileged access to EPA networks, systems and data. The EPA is required to initiate a background investigation prior to granting access to agency systems and data. This failure to appropriately vet personnel leaves the agency vulnerable to a cyberattack.

Not vetting contractor personnel before granting them network access exposes the EPA to risks. Contractor personnel with potentially questionable backgrounds who access sensitive agency data could cause harm.

Management action is needed to correct how the EPA implements its background screening. In particular, we noted the following control weaknesses:

- The EPA was not initiating required background investigations for contractor personnel in high-risk positions.
- The EPA has not identified all high-risk information technology positions.
- The EPA has not assigned a risk determination for information security contractor personnel.
- EPA system owners, service managers and contracting officer's representatives did not verify whether contractor personnel possessed the required background investigations.
- The EPA's internal websites do not specify background investigation requirements for contractor personnel.
- The EPA does not have an accurate number for how many information security contractor personnel require high-risk background investigations.

Recommendation and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the agency implement controls over the EPA's personnel screening practices for initiating the required high-level background investigation for contractor personnel with privileged access to agency networks, information systems and data. We briefed the EPA on August 21, 2017. Management agreed with our findings and recommendation. The EPA will provide planned completion dates in a formal response to this report.