

Scientific Integrity

ISSUE SUMMARY:

The agency's ability to pursue its mission to protect human health and the environment depends upon the scientific integrity of its decision making. EPA adheres to professional practices, ethical behavior, and the principles of honesty and objectivity when conducting, managing, using the results of, and communicating about science and scientific activities. Inclusivity, transparency, and protection from inappropriate influences are hallmarks of scientific integrity. EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy (Policy) has been in effect since February of 2012 with a fully updated version expected to be released in late 2024 or early 2025.

EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy:

- protects scientific processes;
- guides our review of science and our federal advisory committees;
- ensures the free flow of scientific information;
- supports our decision making processes;
- ensures accountability for losses of scientific integrity;
- protects EPA employees; and
- supports professional development for government scientists.

The Policy applies to the entire EPA workforce including scientists, managers, special government employees, and political appointees, as well as contractors, grantees, collaborators, and student volunteers.

EPA's Scientific Integrity Program is responsible for fully implementing EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy including drafting related policies, providing scientific integrity advice, and, when necessary, addressing violations of the Policy. The Scientific Integrity Program also provides outreach and training to increase EPA staff familiarity with the Policy and their responsibilities for upholding our culture of scientific integrity. The program has created EPA-wide scientific integrity training programs, including mandatory onboarding training, training for new managers and advisory committees, and face-to-face trainings and webinars for a variety of audiences at EPA locations across the country.

The EPA 2022-2026 Strategic Plan includes a cross-agency strategy to ensure scientific integrity and science-based decision making. By 2026, Deputy Scientific Integrity Officials will certify completion of 126 actions to ensure:

- Scientific integrity is highly visible at EPA;
- All of EPA embraces and models scientific integrity; and
- Robust mechanisms protect and maintain EPA's culture of scientific integrity.

UPCOMING MILESTONES:

- In early 2024, EPA released an updated Scientific Integrity Policy for public comment that was given high marks by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. A new Scientific Integrity Policy is expected by late 2024 or early 2025.

- EPA Deputy Scientific Integrity Officials have certified the completion of 25 actions to support scientific integrity in FY 2023 (exceeding the target of 21) and are on track to complete more than 22 actions by the end of FY 2024.

BACKGROUND:

EPA's Scientific Integrity Program works across the agency to implement EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy through policy documents, outreach to employees (including an agency-wide annual meeting with EPA's Scientific Integrity Official), required scientific integrity training for all new employees, training designed for managers, addressing employee scientific integrity concerns, an annual report on scientific integrity, and surveys to all employees to evaluate the implementation of the Scientific Integrity Policy and assess the culture of scientific integrity at EPA.

EPA regularly engages its scientific integrity stakeholders by holding regular stakeholder meetings (accessible in person and virtually) for both internal and external audiences, by releasing an annual report, and by participating in quarterly interagency meetings. EPA has trained thousands of its employees on its Scientific Integrity Policy, including over 1,000 EPA managers. A recent internal EPA survey documented that 91% of respondents are familiar with EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy. Additionally, EPA has a 93% completion rate on onboarding training within six months of hire. The program has multiple documents for employees to reference as they uphold our culture of scientific integrity including [Approaches for Expressing and Resolving Differing Scientific Opinions](#), [Best Practices for Authorship](#), and [EPA's Peer Review Handbook](#).

Since the Policy was enacted in 2012, EPA has received over 500 scientific integrity concerns brought to its attention as queries for advice or as allegations of a loss of scientific integrity. If EPA's Scientific Integrity Official finds that there might be a violation of the Policy, the Scientific Integrity Official and Scientific Integrity Committee evaluate and investigate the issue. If an allegation is substantiated, the determination and recommendations to safeguard the science are communicated to the relevant parties for implementation.

The Scientific Integrity Official is located in ORD and provides agency-wide leadership on scientific integrity. Deputy Scientific Integrity Officials are located in each EPA program office and region. These Deputy Scientific Integrity Officials, together with the Scientific Integrity Official, compose the Scientific Integrity Committee.

KEY EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS:

☒ Congress ☒ Industry ☐ States ☐ Tribes ☒ Media ☒ Other Federal Agency
☒ NGO ☐ Local Government ☐ Other (Local unions)

Congress, the media, industry and NGOs follow scientific integrity at EPA very closely. Other federal agencies pay attention to EPA's scientific integrity efforts and EPA's Scientific Integrity Official has co-chaired multi-agency scientific integrity initiatives and currently chairs the OSTP National Science and Technology Committee Subcommittee on Scientific Integrity, a position she was appointed to and then elected to for a term ending in 2025.

MOVING FORWARD:

- Release of EPA's 2024 Scientific Integrity Policy and new training initiatives
- Implementation of an agency-wide electronic clearance system for scientific products
- Continuing research and policy efforts to enhance the culture of scientific integrity at EPA

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LEAD OFFICE/REGION: ORD

OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: PROGRAMS, REGIONS