



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

July 16, 2024

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Notification:
Evaluation of EPA Policies, Procedures, and Processes for ASPECT Flight Missions
Project No. OSRE-FY24-0103

FROM: Gabby Fekete, Director
Programs, Offices, and Centers Oversight Directorate
Office of Special Review and Evaluation

TO: Barry Breen, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator
Office of Land and Emergency Management

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Inspector General plans to begin an evaluation of EPA policies, procedures, and processes for the Airborne Spectral Photometric Environmental Collection Technology, or ASPECT, flight missions. This evaluation is in response to a hotline complaint. This evaluation also addresses the following fiscal year 2024 top management challenge for the Agency: promoting ethical conduct and protecting scientific integrity.

Our objective is to determine whether the EPA and its contractors followed ASPECT flight equipment deployment procedures during the East Palestine, Ohio train derailment emergency. We plan to conduct work within the Office of Land and Emergency Management and Region 5. We will conduct the evaluation using *Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation*, issued by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency. The anticipated benefits of this evaluation include improved response to emergencies.

We will contact you to arrange a mutually agreeable time to discuss our objective. At that time, we can discuss any concerns that you may have and answer any questions about the evaluation process, reporting procedures, methods used to gather and analyze data, and what we should expect of each other during the evaluation. Throughout the evaluation, we will provide updates on a regular basis.

To expedite our evaluation, please provide the following information by July 31, 2024:

- All current policies, procedures, and processes for ASPECT flight equipment deployment and those that were in effect at the time of the East Palestine train derailment.

- All current contracts related to ASPECT flight equipment deployment and those that were in effect at the time of the East Palestine train derailment.
- All current *Quality Assurance Project Plans* related to ASPECT flight equipment deployment and those that were in effect at the time of the East Palestine train derailment.

We respectfully note that the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, authorizes the OIG to have timely access to personnel and all materials necessary to complete our objectives. Similarly, EPA Manual 6500, *Functions and Activities of the Office of Inspector General* (1994), requires that each EPA employee cooperate with and fully disclose information to the OIG. Additionally, Administrator Michael S. Regan, in a June 17, 2024 email to EPA employees, stated that “it is the duty of all EPA personnel to cooperate fully with the OIG and to provide information the office needs to fulfill its oversight responsibilities.” He also indicated that the “OIG’s independent oversight of our agency makes it an indispensable partner in our efforts to protect public health and the environment.” If an Agency employee or contractor refuses to provide requested materials to the OIG or otherwise fails to cooperate with the OIG, we will request that you immediately resolve the situation. Consistent with the Inspector General Act, we may report unresolved access matters to the administrator and to Congress.

We will post this memorandum on our public website at www.epaoig.gov. Anyone with knowledge of potential fraud, waste, abuse, misconduct, or mismanagement related to this evaluation should contact the OIG Hotline at (888) 546-8740 or via an electronic form on the “OIG Hotline” [webpage](#).

cc: Janet McCabe, Deputy Administrator
Dan Utech, Chief of Staff, Office of the Administrator
Wesley J. Carpenter, Deputy Chief of Staff for Management, Office of the Administrator
Clifford Villa, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Land and Emergency Management
Brendan Roache, Acting Director, Office of Emergency Management, Office of Land and Emergency Management
Debra Shore, Regional Administrator, Region 5
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Susan Perkins, Agency Follow-Up Coordinator
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Sean W. O’Donnell, Inspector General
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