

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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June 10, 2009

Mr. Gene L. Dodaro  
Acting Comptroller General  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G St. NW  
Washington, DC 20584

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

The Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) was established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to provide science-based risk assessments of chemicals. Over the last eight years, the IRIS database has languished as a result of continuous process changes and endless interagency peer review processes demanded by officials in the Office of Management and Budget. In the last three years, an average of only two chemicals were added to the database, while EPA was given budget and staffing to produce 20 new entries each year.

The Subcommittee held two hearings in the 110<sup>th</sup> Congress on problems with the IRIS program. We will hold our third hearing on this matter on June 11, 2009 and Mr. John Stephenson of your office will be testifying. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) was concerned enough about the failings of the IRIS program to have placed the program on your "high risk" list. On May 21, 2009 the new Administrator of EPA, Ms. Lisa Jackson, announced that EPA was establishing a new IRIS process. The new process brings undoubted improvements in transparency. However, the Subcommittee remains concerned that the new process may be unduly influenced by other agencies that might hinder IRIS entries from moving forward, and remains too convoluted to allow for timely production of IRIS assessments.

By this letter, I ask that you undertake a review of how the new IRIS process performs in practice. While I am sure that your office will monitor developments simply because of IRIS's status as a "high risk" program, I ask that you specifically examine the new process with an eye to answering the following questions.

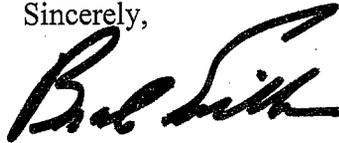
1. Does EPA truly control the process? In the last Administration, new steps were imposed on EPA over time by officials in the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs at OMB. These new steps were not public and seemed to

evolve over time. The Subcommittee would like GAO to look for signs of similar developments that fall outside the announced process.

2. Can EPA improve the timeliness of its IRIS entries? The new process shows a timeline for performance of each step in the new process. Can EPA keep to these schedules and can it force other agencies to adhere to these schedules?
3. Are the transparency standards adhered to and sufficient? While all interagency written comments are to be made public, will other, informal communication methods be developed to evade this transparency?
4. As the process unfolds, does GAO observe any means to streamline the process further so that productivity is enhanced?

These are some of the issues of concern to the Subcommittee. We stand ready to discuss the scope and timing of this project with representatives of your office. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Brad Miller  
Subcommittee Chairman  
Investigations and Oversight

Cc: BART GORDON  
Full Committee Chairman

RALPH HALL  
Full Committee Ranking Member

PAUL BROUN  
Subcommittee Ranking Member