

# Bloomberg Environment & Energy Report

## EPA Defends Shifting Staff Between Chemical Risk Efforts

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The EPA attempted to justify its decision to shift chemical risk assessment staff toward a program that determines whether chemicals should be restricted, responding to concerns raised March 27 by a House subcommittee leadership.

Under the Integrated Risk Information Program, also known as IRIS, the EPA studies the potential adverse health effects of human exposure to various chemicals and doses at which harm might occur. State and federal regulators combine the resulting health assessments with exposure information to set standards and regulations on air and water pollution, chemicals, and contaminated sites.

The Government Accountability Office found 28 of the agency's 30 IRIS program staff were directed last October to work instead on the agency's evaluations for chemicals that may be regulated under the Toxic Substances Control Act, Alfredo Gomez, who directs the independent watchdog's environmental protection work, said at a House Science, Space and Technology Committee subcommittee hearing.

Rep. Lizzie Fletcher (D-Texas), chair of the committee's environment subcommittee, asked the EPA to justify shifting those staff members.

An EPA official emphasized that the IRIS staff did that work without being moved to another office, and that they did so in partnership with colleagues working on scientific issues.

"We take a one EPA approach," Jennifer Orme-Zavaleta, principal deputy assistant administrator for science for the EPA's Office of Research and Development and the EPA's science adviser, said at the hearing.

Fletcher didn't pursue the subject, and Gomez and Orme-Zavaleta didn't provide additional information about the impact of shifting the staff.

"The changes achieve scientific leadership, better integrate scientific approaches to problems, support mission and customer focused solutions to environmental challenges, and create communities of practice within the organization," a spokeswoman for the EPA said in an email to Bloomberg Environment.

### Reorganization Ahead

An internal agency document, obtained by Bloomberg Environment, indicates proposed changes for almost every program under the research and development office.

The reorganization could help Environmental Protection Agency programs collaborate, but also could remove the leader of the center overseeing and supporting the chemical risk assessment program, said Robert Kavlock, former acting assistant administrator of the EPA's Office of Research and Development.

The agency document indicates no staff would be cut, but Kavlock said there are likely to be fewer directors as a result.

The new structure would put the agency's IRIS assessment-producing functions, currently part of the National Center for Environmental Assessment, under a newly created Center for Public Health and Environmental Assessment. That center also would include the EPA programs that focus on human and ecological health assessments, according to the internal document.

On the EPA's website, the agency describes the National Center for Environmental Assessment's placement between research efforts and rulemakers as "critical."

The Office of Research and Development last was reorganized in 1995, according to the EPA.