U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Inspector General

11-P-0215
May 3, 2011

At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We sought to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has planned and conducted the requisite research and testing to evaluate and regulate endocrine-disrupting chemicals. We focused on EPA's Endocrine Disruptor Screening Program (EDSP) because it is the program that focuses on screening and testing chemicals with endocrine-disrupting effects.

Background

In 1996, Congress passed the Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA), which gave EPA the authority to screen and test substances that may have an effect in humans that is similar to that of a naturally occurring estrogen, or such other endocrine effects as the EPA Administrator may designate. In 1998, EPA established the EDSP, which uses a two-tiered screening and testing approach to assess endocrine effects. EDSP was expanded to include androgenic and thyroid effects.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional, Public Affairs and Management at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2011/20110503-11-P-0215.pdf

EPA's Endocrine Disruptor Screening Program Should Establish Management Controls to Ensure More Timely Results

What We Found

Fourteen years after passage of the FQPA and Safe Drinking Water Act amendments, EPA's EDSP has not determined whether any chemical is a potential endocrine disruptor. EDSP has not developed a management plan laying out the program's goals and priorities, or established outcome performance measures to track program results. EDSP missed milestones for assay validation and chemical selection established by the 2001 Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) settlement agreement. Completed activities exceeded their targets by about 4½ to 6 years. An EDSP manager told us that EDSP was unaware of the complexities, resources, and time needed to validate assays until years after the 2001 settlement agreement was signed. However, EDSP did not substantially revise its milestones for completing assay validation in its status reports to NRDC. For example, 9 of 11 updates that EPA provided to NRDC for the estrogen receptor binding assay incrementally adjusted the milestones, collectively, by a total of 4½ years. Concerned about program progress, in 2007, Congress instituted reporting requirements, and in 2009, specified deadlines for certain EDSP activities. As a result, EPA recently published two EDSP documents for public comment.

We acknowledge the difficulties involved in establishing an effective endocrine disruptor screening and testing program. However, in addition to lacking a management plan and outcome measures, EDSP has not created a final statement of policy, finalized specific procedures to evaluate Tier 1 screening results, or established specific procedures to evaluate Tier 2 testing results. EDSP needs to develop and implement plans and performance measures to establish management control and accountability. EDSP plans to develop a management plan for the program but had not done so at the time of our review.

What We Recommend

We recommend that EPA (1) define and identify the universe of chemicals for screening and testing, (2) develop and publish a standardized methodology for prioritizing the universe of chemicals for screening and testing, (3) finalize specific Tier 1 and Tier 2 criteria to evaluate testing data, (4) develop performance measures, (5) develop a comprehensive management plan, and (6) hold annual program reviews. EPA agreed to develop a comprehensive management plan and performance measures. However, EPA's response did not provide sufficient information for us to determine whether its plans to develop a standardized methodology for chemical prioritization and to finalize Tier 2 criteria would meet the intent of the two recommendations. The Agency did not agree to define and identify the universe of chemicals, and only agreed to continue its existing annual program reviews. We consider recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 6 unresolved.