



## OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

# News Release

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### **EPA Office of Inspector General identifies improvements the EPA should implement to address cumulative impacts and disproportionate health effects**

**WASHINGTON** – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Inspector General today issued a [report](#) with its findings regarding what actions the EPA has taken to identify and address any disproportionate health effects to disadvantaged communities surrounding the 35th Avenue Superfund site in North Birmingham, Alabama.

The audit determined that, although the EPA examined air, water, and waste issues in North Birmingham, the Agency needs to refine and implement guidance to address cumulative impacts and disproportionate health effects across environmental programs. Auditors found that the four EPA divisions responsible for cleanups in the communities surrounding the 35th Avenue Superfund site took a largely siloed approach, looking primarily at cumulative impacts *within* individual programs rather than *across* programs. The underlying cause of this siloed approach was the lack of both statutory mandates and agencywide policies and guidance for considering cumulative impacts and disproportionate health effects across programs. Such an approach potentially limits the EPA’s ability to address disproportionate impacts to overburdened communities and prevents the EPA from fully assessing its progress in achieving equity and environmental justice.

Since the audit began, the EPA has taken actions to further address environmental justice and better consider cumulative impacts in its decision-making—including developing guidance and plans. However, the guidance and plans do not explicitly state how programs should coordinate with one another to address cumulative impacts. Furthermore, the EPA has not established performance measures related to identifying and addressing cumulative impacts and disproportionate health effects across programs to ensure the Agency consistently identifies and addresses disproportionate health effects.

“The Agency cannot achieve progress toward environmental justice or address disproportionate health effects office by office,” said EPA Inspector General Sean O’Donnell. “EPA leaders must

adopt a whole-of-agency approach to protecting public health and the environment in communities like North Birmingham.”

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