



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chair Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX)
Subcommittee on Environment

Joint Subcommittee Hearing:

EPA's IRIS Program: Reviewing its Progress and Roadblocks Ahead
March 27, 2019

Good morning, and I would like to join Chairwoman Sherrill in welcoming all of our witnesses on both panels for being here today.

The EPA's IRIS program conducts human health assessments that look at the health effects of chemical exposures in the environment. IRIS assessments are unique in providing information on chemical exposures and environmental hazards that may affect the general population, including children and the elderly, and that can occur over a lifetime.

IRIS assessments follow a thorough process that includes internal and external peer review, as well as opportunity for public input. While the IRIS program suffered from timeliness and transparency issues earlier this decade, the program has incorporated many recommendations from the GAO and the National Academies of Sciences that have improved its processes.

The IRIS program was intentionally placed in EPA's Office of Research and Development, a non-regulatory program office at the agency, to ensure that only credible science guided the development of its impartial assessments, which are not regulatory in nature.

There are many federal, state, and local stakeholders, however, that rely on IRIS assessments to help make regulatory decisions that protect public health. Program and regional offices within the EPA routinely rely on IRIS assessments to guide their risk-management decisions. IRIS assessments are not considered to be duplicative of other federal chemical assessments, like those carried out under EPA's Toxic Substances Control Act, or TSCA [TOS-ca].

This is why the recent series of announcements by the EPA removing the chemical formaldehyde from its IRIS workflow, and adding it to its TSCA workflow, is concerning; it appears to reset the clock on a late-stage IRIS assessment.

Non-federal stakeholders, including community groups and state, local, and tribal agencies, rely on IRIS assessments not only because of their rigor and thoroughness, but also because many of these entities do not have the capacity to conduct such thorough toxicity assessments on their own. The values derived in IRIS assessments are routinely the top choice of state regulatory

bodies in their standard setting work because they are the most thoroughly developed and vetted values available.

Because of its rigorous process, and the reliance of both federal and nonfederal stakeholders of IRIS assessments to use them to direct risk management decisions relating to public health, the program plays a unique role that is complimentary to other review processes like TSCA.

Given this background, the findings of GAO's March 4 report detailing political interference in the publication of IRIS assessments raise serious concerns. The EPA is responsible for protecting public health and the environment through the application of sound science, and should not be creating internal roadblocks to performing this critical mission.

That is why I am glad we will be hearing from witnesses on both of our distinguished panels today; hearing from the EPA and GAO on the findings of this recent GAO report, and gaining a better understanding of the need for and importance of IRIS assessments, the improvements the program has made over the years, and the critical role these assessments play in protecting public health.

And with that I yield back the balance of my time.