



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We received a hotline complaint alleging concerns with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Research and Development's (ORD's) Community-Focused Exposure and Risk Screening Tool (C-FERST). To address the hotline allegations, we evaluated how ORD planned, developed and implemented C-FERST.

C-FERST is an online information and mapping tool, launched in September 2016, that communities and the public can use to learn more about their environmental issues and exposures. According to ORD, C-FERST is intended to serve a broad range of users (e.g., general public, state/local risk assessors, public health agencies and environmental justice coordinators). The purpose of this management alert is not to raise a health concern but rather to timely notify the EPA so that it can promptly act to better manage its planned investment in C-FERST to prevent waste.

This report addresses the following:

- *Improving EPA research programs.*
- *Operating efficiently and effectively.*

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Listing of [OIG reports](#).

Management Alert: EPA Should Promptly Reassess Community Risk Screening Tool

What We Found

Our review substantiates some hotline allegations about C-FERST. We found that ORD took 8 years to develop a tool that:

- Is different from its intended purpose.
- Did not have a project proposal or request for its development.
- Was outside the agency's information technology requirements.
- Overlaps with other EPA tools.
- Was not widely used in the approximately 9 months after it was publicly released, according to available user data.

C-FERST overlaps with other tools and is not yet widely used, underscoring its \$400,000 planned yearly investment as a risk. Efforts by the agency to cut costs, streamline activities and avoid duplication compound the need for the EPA to promptly review C-FERST and similar tools.

ORD planned and designed C-FERST internally as a research tool—outside of the agency's information technology monitoring and accountability requirements—and altered the original purpose of the tool during development without properly documenting this change. ORD also did not consider outcome measures or possible joint governance with similar EPA tools.

Without proper accountability controls, ORD creates a risk that the estimated \$400,000 it plans to spend annually for maintenance, operation and enhancements of C-FERST is wasteful government spending. Without metrics to measure performance, it is unclear if C-FERST is being used for its intended purpose or meets user needs. Further, having multiple agency mapping tools that perform similar functions can confuse potential users.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the Assistant Administrator for ORD review C-FERST and develop an action plan to address issues identified, including whether to retain the tool. If retained, we recommend that ORD develop performance metrics and a user survey. We also recommend that ORD develop certain policies and procedures, review new and existing ORD research tools to determine applicability of the EPA's information technology requirements, and work with agency offices responsible for other geospatial mapping tools to develop a decision support matrix on when to use certain tools. ORD agreed with our findings and recommendations and provided acceptable corrective actions and estimated completion dates. ORD's recommendations are resolved with corrective actions pending.

We also recommend that the Deputy Administrator examine all of the EPA's web-based risk screening and mapping tools to ensure the need for each tool. This recommendation is unresolved.