



Office of Inspector General U.S. Environmental Protection Agency **At a Glance**

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Why We Did This Evaluation

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Inspector General conducted this evaluation to determine whether the EPA's process for screening self-reported violations through its electronic disclosure, or eDisclosure, system is effective and ensures that significant concerns, such as criminal conduct and potential imminent hazards, are addressed by the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance.

The goal of the eDisclosure system is to provide an efficient mechanism for regulated entities to self-disclose—that is, voluntarily discover, report, and correct—violations of federal environmental laws and regulations. Self-disclosed violations are automatically processed under the EPA's audit policies. The EPA subsequently screens certain eDisclosure submissions to ensure that significant concerns, such as criminal conduct and potential imminent hazards, are properly addressed.

This evaluation supports EPA mission-related efforts:

- *Compliance with the law.*
- *Operating efficiently and effectively.*

This evaluation addresses a top EPA [management challenge](#):

- *Enforcing environmental laws and regulations.*

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Additional Internal Controls Would Improve the EPA's System for Electronic Disclosure of Environmental Violations

What We Found

The eDisclosure system does not have adequate internal controls in place to ensure that the EPA's screening process is effective and that significant concerns, such as criminal conduct and potential imminent hazards, are identified and addressed by the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance and the EPA regions. There is no formal, written national guidance or eDisclosure-specific training available on how EPA staff should conduct screening or delineate staff responsibilities. As a result, most regions are inconsistently screening for significant concerns or not screening at all because they either believe OECA is responsible for that task, do not have access to the eDisclosure system, or have other resource limitations. Further, the EPA does not have performance measures and does not systematically track eDisclosure system data. Finally, the eDisclosure system's reporting tool does not allow staff to effectively or robustly use or track eDisclosure submissions.

Without national screening guidance, training, effective monitoring, and Central Data Exchange improvements, there is a risk that significant concerns are not being addressed and that the impacts of the EPA's eDisclosure system will remain limited and unknown.

Without additional internal controls, the EPA cannot ensure that it effectively screens regulated entities' self-disclosures of environmental violations to identify and mitigate significant concerns, such as criminal conduct and potential imminent hazards. If not mitigated, these significant concerns could pose threats to human health and the environment.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the assistant administrator for Enforcement and Compliance Assurance develop national guidance that includes a process for screening eDisclosure submissions for significant concerns; provide eDisclosure-specific training to EPA headquarters and regions to clarify expectations, establish staff responsibilities, and communicate best practices; develop performance measures for the eDisclosure system, as well as a monitoring plan to track its effectiveness; and assess eDisclosure system functionality to identify and implement improvements.

OECA agreed with all four of our recommendations and proposed acceptable corrective actions and estimated completion dates. All recommendations are resolved with corrective actions pending. Where appropriate, we revised the report based on technical comments provided by OECA.