EPA Strengthens Key Scientific Database to Protect Public Health (HQ)

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WASHINGTON – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency today announced plans to improve its Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) program as part of an ongoing effort initiated in 2009 to strengthen the program. IRIS is a publicly available on-line database that provides high quality science-based human health assessments used to inform the agency’s decisions on protecting public health and the environment

“Decision makers rely on the IRIS program for accessible, science-based health assessments of environmental contaminants,” said Paul Anastas, assistant administrator of EPA's Office of Research and Development. “Further strengthening the IRIS program is part of EPA’s commitment to continuous improvement and ensuring we use the best possible science to protect human health and the environment.”

The improvements announced today will make IRIS even stronger. All new IRIS assessment documents will be shorter, clearer and more visual, concise, and transparent. IRIS users can expect to see a reduced volume of text and increased clarity and transparency of data, methods, and decision criteria. Documents will be rigorously edited to eliminate inconsistencies and address redundancies and will include more graphical and tabular representations of data. Related discussions will also be consolidated into concise narrative descriptions.

To make the scientific rationale behind the assessments and toxicity values as transparent as possible, EPA will evaluate and describe the strengths and weaknesses of critical studies in a more uniform way. EPA will also indicate which criteria were most influential in evaluating the weight of the scientific evidence supporting its choice of toxicity values.

The latest actions are in direct response to recommendations received on April 8, 2011, from the National Academy of Sciences (NAS).

EPA is working closely with the agency’s Science Advisory Board on how to bring to bear its expertise on an ongoing basis to focus on the quality, transparency and scientific rigor of IRIS assessments and guide EPA’s response to the NAS recommendations.

EPA will also create a new peer consultation step early in the development of major IRIS assessments to enhance the input of the scientific community as assessments

are designed.

In 2009, EPA implemented an improved IRIS process to ensure scientific quality, integrity, transparency, and the timeliness of EPA's efforts to manage chemical risks.

The process now includes a streamlined review schedule, ensuring that the majority of assessments will be finalized within two years of their start date, opportunities for input from EPA scientists, federal agency reviewers, and the public, and greater transparency by making the scientific studies used to develop assessments available through the Health and Environmental Research Online database.

The IRIS database includes more than 540 chemical substances, containing crucial information about how they impact human health. Combined with exposure information, governments and private entities use IRIS to help characterize the public health risks of chemical substances, thereby supporting risk management decisions designed to protect public health.

More information about IRIS: http://www.epa.gov/iris/ [1]

Information about the IRIS process: http://www.epa.gov/iris/process.htm [2]

SOURCE [3]

SOURCE [4]

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[1] http://www.epa.gov/iris/
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