

Watchdog to Examine EPA Use of Alias Emails

JOSH LEDERMAN, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A government watchdog is looking into Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson's use of alias email accounts to conduct official business.

The audit by the EPA inspector general will determine whether EPA officials, including Jackson, followed federal laws and regulations when using secondary email accounts the public didn't know about. The EPA has said such accounts are standard practice, but their use raised concerns that the accounts could be used to skirt record-keeping and transparency requirements.

Republicans on the House Science Committee, led by Chairman Ralph Hall of Texas, requested a review in November following reports that Jackson used a secondary account under the name "Richard Windsor" to conduct EPA business. In letters to Jackson and to the inspector general, who is independent of the EPA, Hall questioned whether EPA's practices violated the Obama administration's commitment to unprecedented transparency.

GOP scrutiny of the practice grew last week, when House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton, R-Mich., wrote to the EPA requesting detailed information about its internal practices for electronic records and alias emails.

An EPA spokeswoman said Wednesday that the agency welcomes the audit and has nothing to hide.

In a letter to Hall, EPA Associate Administrator Arvin Ganesan said the agency's administrators have been using secondary accounts for more than a decade. Jackson's primary account, which uses her actual name, is posted to the agency's website, resulting in hundreds of thousands of emails per year from members of the public. So Jackson uses the alias account for communications with other officials, Ganesan said.

"This practice of maintaining one staff-managed public email address and another secondary address for use by a high-profile individual is commonly employed in both the public and private sector," Ganesan wrote.

All emails sent and received through the secondary account are treated the same as those from the public account when it comes to records requests from Congress and the public, the EPA said.

But Rep. Cliff Stearns, R-Fla., who chairs the energy panel's investigative subcommittee, said he wasn't yet convinced.

"We have concerns these email aliases may compromise the agency's

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transparency," Stearns said. "While we welcome this investigation from the (inspector general), the committee is still awaiting direct answers from EPA."

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