U.S. EPA Scientific Integrity Program
Determination regarding Allegations of a Loss of Scientific Integrity concerning Remarks by Administrator Pruitt

April 24, 2017

Background on Scientific Integrity

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is dedicated to preserving the integrity of the scientific and scholarly activities it conducts and that are conducted on its behalf. The EPA Scientific Integrity Policy[1], dated February 2012, provides principles and standards to ensure scientific integrity in the use, conduct, and communication of science. When this policy is not adhered to, or is circumvented, the robustness of EPA science and the trust in the results of our scientific work can be impacted, causing a loss of scientific integrity. Loss of scientific integrity is the result of a deliberate action by an employee that compromises the conduct, production, or use of scientific and scholarly activities and assessments. EPA does not tolerate loss of integrity in the performance of scientific and scholarly activities or in the application of science in decision making.

Procedures for Resolving Allegations of a Loss of Scientific Integrity

Allegations of the loss of scientific or scholarly integrity are submitted to the EPA's Scientific Integrity Official (ScIO). We consider three criteria when establishing a loss of scientific integrity:

1) There is a significant departure from accepted practices of the relevant scientific or scholarly community;
2) The actions causing the loss of integrity are committed intentionally, knowingly or recklessly; and,
3) The allegation is proven by a preponderance of evidence.

If there is a reasonable basis to believe that the allegation may have merit, a Scientific Integrity Review Panel, comprised of the relevant Deputy Scientific Integrity Official (DScIO) and two or more impartial DScIOs, provide a review of the science and any other relevant information and reach a majority consensus.

Scientific Integrity Review Panel

A Scientific Integrity Review Panel (SIRP) comprised of John Reeder, (the DScIO for the Office of the Administrator), Bruce Rodan, Ph.D. (the DScIO for the Office of Research and Development (ORD)), Betsy Shaw, (the DScIO for the Office of Air and Radiation), Carol Ann Siciliano, J.D. (DScIO for the Office of General Counsel (OGC)), and Kevin Teichman, Ph.D., (Scientific Integrity Policy expert in the Office of Research and Development), was convened on April 24, 2017 to review the relevant information on the case.

[1] https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-02/documents/scientific_integrity_policy_2012.pdf (last visited April 4, 2017)

Background and Summary of the Allegation

- On March 9, 2017, during a CNBC interview, Administrator Pruitt was asked, "Do you believe that it's been proven that carbon dioxide ["CO_2"] is the primary control knob for climate?" He responded:

  > "No. I think that measuring with precision human activity on the climate is something very challenging to do and there's tremendous disagreement about the degree of impact. So no, I would not agree that it's a primary contributor to the global warming that we see. But we don't know that yet . . . We need to continue the debate and continue the review and the analysis."[2]

- On March 14, 2017, The Sierra Club submitted an allegation[3] to the EPA Office of Inspector General asserting that Administrator Pruitt's above statement contradicted the international scientific consensus on climate change, and alleging this was a violation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Scientific Integrity Policy.[4]

- On March 29, 2017, the Office of Inspector General referred this allegation to the EPA Scientific Integrity Official, Francesca Grifo, and informed the Sierra Club of this referral.
- In addition, the Office of Inspector General indicated that if, after the Scientific Integrity Official reviewed this case, "there is some aspect of the letter itself, or your findings or conclusions that you believe are appropriate for further consideration by the OIG, please notify me."

During its inquiry regarding this allegation, the EPA Scientific Integrity Official evaluated the original letter submitted by the Sierra Club, the content of the Scientific Integrity Policy, and the Coordination Procedures between the Scientific Integrity Official and the Office of Inspector General regarding Research Misconduct Allegations[5].

Allegation #1

- Administrator Pruitt's above statement contradicts the international scientific consensus on climate change, which violates the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Scientific Integrity Policy.

Analysis

The Scientific Integrity team together with the Scientific Integrity Review Panel named above, focused their review on the following text included in the EPA Scientific Integrity Policy[6]:

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[2] Video clip of the interview: http://www.businessinsider.com/scott-pruitt-climatechange-2017-3 (last visited 3/13/17).
[3] https://www.docdroid.net/HvDdJZs/sierra-club-scientific-integrity-complaint-3-14-17.pdf.html (last visited 4/4/17)

[4] https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-02/documents/scientific_integrity_policy_2012.pdf (last visited 4/4/17)

[5] https://intranet.ord.epa.gov/sites/default/files/media/oig-scio_coordination_procedures_final.pdf (last visited 4/4/17)

[6] https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2014-02/documents/scientific_integrity_policy_2012.pdf (last visited

When an Agency employee substantively engaged in the science informing an Agency policy decision disagrees with the scientific data, scientific interpretations, or scientific conclusions that will be relied upon for said Agency decision, the employee is encouraged to express that opinion…

The Scientific Integrity Policy applies to all EPA employees, contractors, grantees, collaborators and student volunteers, including political appointees. The freedom to express one's opinion is fundamental to EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy even (and especially), when that point of view might be controversial. Science is part of EPA's work. Many people, including managers and the Administrator, are substantively engaged in science that may someday inform policy decisions. Expressing an opinion about that science is not a violation of the EPA Scientific Integrity Policy. Indeed, the Scientific Integrity Policy – in the spirit of promoting vigorous debate and inquiry -- specifically encourages employees to express disagreement with scientific data, scientific interpretations or scientific conclusions.

In this case, the Administrator was asked during a television interview, "Do you believe…." In response, the Administrator expressed his opinion regarding contributors to global warming and called for more debate, review and analysis. As an opinion, the Administrator's statement does not violate the Agency's Scientific Integrity Policy. The Policy encourages open dialogue among scientists and managers when there are differences of opinion. The Administrator's statement was just that – a statement. It was not associated with a policy decision and did not suppress or alter Agency scientific findings.

Our Scientific Integrity Policy is designed to promote a culture of scientific integrity. The scientific information and processes relied upon in decision making are enhanced by our focus on transparency, open communication, our firm commitment to evidence, honest investigation, and a robust culture of scientific inquiry and discussion.

Findings

Criteria to Establish a Loss of Scientific Integrity	Findings by the Scientific Integrity Review Panel
A significant departure from accepted practices of the relevant scientific or scholarly community?	No, the Scientific Integrity Policy encourages all employees at all ranks and all kinds of appointments to express differing opinions.
The actions causing the loss of integrity were committed intentionally, knowingly or recklessly?	This is not relevant here since no violation of the Policy has been found.

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The allegation is proven by a preponderance of evidence?	No.

The Scientific Integrity Review Panel concludes that expressing an opinion is not a violation of the EPA Scientific Integrity Policy and, as such, the Administrator's statement does not violate the Agency's Scientific Integrity Policy.

Decision

Expressing an opinion is not a violation of the EPA Scientific Integrity Policy and, as such, the Administrator's statement does not violate the Agency's Scientific Integrity Policy.