Message

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Sent: 3/20/2019 1:57:28 PM
To: Dunlap, David [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=591eb15a268249dda0c05a7451f765c3-Dunlap, Dav]
Subject: FYI. Inside EPA coverage of Cr6 document

https://insideepa.com/daily-feed/agenda-set-iris-relaunches-cr6-assessment

With agenda set, IRIS relaunches Cr6 assessment
March 18, 2019
EPA's influential Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) is relaunching its assessment of hexavalent chromium (Cr6) with the release of a protocol document, the first sign of action from the program since Administrator Andrew Wheeler and other top officials scaled back its agenda late last year, a step that drew charges of political interference.

The protocol document, released March 15, is among a handful of early public documents released under IRIS' new systematic review approach to performing the assessments, an approach that IRIS has sought to adopt since the National Academy of Sciences recommended that it do so in a critical 2011 report.

The document provides scoping information for the assessment, describes the literature deemed relevant to the review, and how the assessment will be conducted.

The document marks a rare announcement from EPA's IRIS program, which has largely been sidelined by the Trump EPA as they worked to prioritize pending assessments. IRIS staff were blocked from releasing any documents for several months last summer and fall while Trump EPA officials reviewed its agenda of chemicals for assessment.

But a recent report from the Government Accountability Office raised questions about political appointees' role in the prioritization process, which provided no explanation for a series of dropped assessments, including that of formaldehyde.

The finding prompted Democratic lawmakers to ask EPA's administrator and scientific integrity officer to “investigate whether the Agency’s efforts to prevent the completion of the formaldehyde health assessment constituted a violation of the agency’s scientific integrity policy, and determine whether [David Dunlap, the top political appointee in EPA's Office of Research and Development (ORD)], violated the terms of his recusal agreement by participating in efforts related to the IRIS formaldehyde health assessment.”

The agenda IRIS released last December contained slightly more than half the number of chemicals that had previously been on schedule, GAO's report says. While formaldehyde disappeared from the list without explanation, it still contained a number of long-running assessments of controversial chemicals, including arsenic and Cr6.

EPA has been struggling to update its existing 1998 assessment of Cr6 for years, following the release of a National Toxicology Program study indicating a previously unknown cancer risk from ingesting Cr6. EPA's 1998 assessment only addresses cancer risk from inhalation exposure.

The Cr6 assessment has been years in the making. A stringent 2010 draft assessment drew the ire of regulated industry, and the American Chemistry Council funded new research into Cr6's biological mode of action -- which can be used to argue that an EPA risk assessment should be conducted in a less stringent way with non-linear modeling if a non-mutagenic mode of action can be demonstrated with sufficient evidence.

The peer review panel that reviewed the assessment recommended that EPA delay the assessment to wait for the research to be completed -- though some months later, environmental groups claimed that some members of the peer review panel had conflicts of interest and should not have served.

EPA agreed to delay the assessment, and eventually agreed to essentially restart it. During a meeting of EPA's science advisors last June, IRIS' Director Kris Thayer acknowledged that the Cr6 document is “very mature."

Thayer explained there are two reasons for re-formulating it through the systematic review process she brought to the IRIS program in 2017: first, staff worked to ensure that the assessment is still a priority to the requesting program office; second, to create a document trail like those of newer assessments that started using the systematic review techniques. She also anticipated that the protocol would be released in time for a public meeting last August.

The new scoping document indicates that an IRIS assessment of Cr6 remains a priority for EPA's Superfund and water offices, as well as all 10 regional offices.

The document also notes that “For the oral [cancer risk] assessment, both linear and nonlinear approaches will be presented for Cr(VI) carcinogenicity to provide insights into uncertainties related to model choice and mechanisms."

EPA released the document for public comment, with an April 29 deadline. EPA also announced that it is planning a public science webinar on the document, scheduled for April 24.

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