

## Webinar Questions & Answers

### Environmental Health Research at EPA: What's happening at ORD?

June 24, 2025

For the full webinar, see:

<https://www.healthandenvironment.org/che-webinars/97001>

*The webinar participants posed a number of questions, some of which were addressed during the webinar. Dr. Jennifer Orme-Zavaleta has written the following answers to add to information that was shared during the webinar.*

**1. Can you speak to how strong research has to be to be turned into regulations? I know that's a big question, but what have been some of the examples where research has turned into strong regulations, and what are examples where blocks have turned up? And what about public health advisory - do you need less evidence to warn the public, can you do that even if the regulations are not in place?**

In developing regulations, programs usually develop a health assessment and a regulatory decision document. The health assessment characterizes all pertinent peer reviewed research studies on the hazard a contaminant poses and an evaluation of exposure from various sources to determine risk. The risk assessment includes factoring in uncertainties due to lack of information and variation in how different organisms and people respond to toxicity. Risk assessments involve a characterization of the weight of evidence for toxicity, including how a contaminant enters the body, how its transformed and eliminated, and all types of toxicity that can result from exposure. Regulatory decisions consider analytical methods to measure the contaminant in the environment and the effectiveness of technological methods to remove the contaminant from the environment. Costs considerations, policy considerations, and other factors may also be considered depending on the statute.

For public health advisories, a number of factors might be considered, and these advisories may be issued if the Administrator determines an immediate threat to public health. You might want to refer to the decision involving Libby Montana and asbestos, as well as the endangerment finding involving CO<sub>2</sub>.

**2. Any update on whether IRIS will still exist and if so where?**

While it has not been stated explicitly with this proposed restructuring, Project 2025 was clear in the desire to eliminate the IRIS program.

**3. Could this lead to clean air and water standards being reevaluated?**

The Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and Safe Drinking Water Act give the Agency direction on development of and review of standards for those programs.

**4. How about more political action in favor of their far more numerous colleagues in academia, who publish so many tox (& risk related) findings, but no one will complain that these findings are massively ignored (<—that's the clue for NGO & allies' focus).**

See response to #1 above; in assessing risk, all pertinent peer reviewed research that is published should be considered in characterizing risks. Regulations undergo review and public comment. If a study is not considered or is discounted in the decision, there is an opportunity to raise this during that process.

**5. Curious if canceled research will impact TSCA risk evaluations. Is there anything obvious that comes to mind?**

ORD's computational toxicology and exposure research helped with screening and prioritization of chemicals under the TSCA program. It appears that this work may be transferred to OCSPP, so may likely continue under the program. Other programs also benefited from this research and it is unclear whether they'll continue to benefit if the work is moved to OCSPP.

**6. So we're losing a lot of federal support, which I don't think we can change by reasoned persuasion. What are our alternatives to federal support to pull coalitions together to step in with funding?**

An option may be to explore funding from private foundations.

**7. Are states immune from these federal changes?**

Short answer, no. States will be significantly impacted. States rely on federal funding and technical support. Many states do not have the funds available, the capability or capacity to absorb the additional work they would need to do in the absence of the federal government.

**8. Follow up q on bias: would moving the Duluth fish/water research and COMPTOX under OCSPP create any conflicts of interest that people should be aware of?**

I'm not aware of conflicts of interest, but Duluth is a freshwater toxicity lab. The Office of Water could be impacted by lack of direct support from Duluth.

**9. Do you foresee that health effects assessments such as the ones IRIS performed will be conducted by individual programs in the future, and that different toxicity values may be used by different USEPA programs in the future?**

Keep in mind the IRIS assessments evolved to provide independent risk assessments that could be used by multiple programs. If each office goes back to doing their own assessments, it will create significant redundancies, potential duplication of effort, inconsistent assessments, and potential vulnerabilities for the Agency. Further, the programs will need to hire staff with the appropriate expertise.