



COMMITTEE ON

**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY**

REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

## Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight and Subcommittee on Environment Hearing - EPA's IRIS Program: Reviewing its Progress and Roadblocks Ahead

### **Opening Statement of Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee Ranking Member Ralph Norman**

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Thank you, Chairwoman Fletcher and Chairwoman Sherrill, for convening this important hearing, and thank you to the witnesses for your testimony this morning.

We are here today to examine the EPA's Integrated Risk Information System Program – also called the IRIS Program or IRIS. This hearing provides an opportunity to review the issues and challenges that burden the IRIS Program, steps that IRIS has taken toward addressing these issues, and challenges that remain. I am hopeful that our expert panel of witnesses will paint a detailed picture of how to improve the IRIS Program and remedy issues that have burdened it for years.

As Ranking Member of the Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee, I approach this issue from an oversight perspective, focused on how to improve IRIS. With a background in business and real estate, I've learned how burdensome and costly onerous regulation can be.

My experience in the real-estate business has also taught me a thing or two about construction. For example, one of the primary tenets of construction is that your foundation is crucial. If you build atop a faulty foundation, the entire structure is at risk and likely ruined where it stands.

As I understand it, IRIS assessments are analogous to a structural foundation. In preparing chemical assessments, IRIS conducts the first two steps of the risk assessment process: First, a hazard identification; and second, a dose-response assessment. EPA's program and regional offices then rely on IRIS assessments as the foundation for conducting the last two steps of the risk assessment process, including: an exposure assessment; and a risk characterization.

As with a structural foundation, if an IRIS assessment is based on flawed information, or is itself faulty, then it jeopardizes all subsequent work that builds atop this faulty foundation. As a result, faulty assessments can lead to bad regulation and unnecessary public health scares.

The IRIS Program must continue to address transparency issues that have plagued it over the past decade, because Americans need assurance that sound science forms the foundation for government regulations.

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) added IRIS to its list of government programs that are highly-vulnerable to risk of waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement in 2009. IRIS was added to GAO's "High-Risk List" because actions were needed to streamline and increase the transparency and dependability of IRIS assessments. Despite attempts at improvement and efforts to remedy its challenges over the past decade, IRIS remains on the High-Risk List today.

In addition to its High-Risk List, GAO recently published a report that examined IRIS' efforts to improve its chemical assessment process and implement outstanding recommendations. While GAO commended IRIS for its efforts to address identified challenges, it also appropriately recognized there remained room for much improvement, especially with respect to issues of timeliness and transparency.

I want to thank GAO for its great work. However, I was puzzled by certain findings regarding EPA leadership. In both reports, GAO seemed to fault EPA leadership for delaying IRIS' progress. It also appeared that EPA leadership was chastised for failing to publicly commit to making IRIS a top priority—as was done by a previous administrator, under a prior administration.

I would suggest that a brief pause may have been necessary to adequately address the issues and challenges that IRIS faces and develop a plan of action for future progress. For example, think about repairing a roller coaster. You don't try to fix a malfunctioning roller coaster while it's rolling around full of people. Instead, you suspend operation and pull the cars off the track for evaluation, which makes for a better ride in the end. Perhaps delays due to EPA leadership deliberation and assessment of IRIS should be handled in a similar fashion.

Despite its issues and challenges, the IRIS Program must still serve a critical function. And everyone here today recognizes the importance of ensuring Americans are protected from the dangers and hazards that IRIS aims to combat. It is for this reason that we must also ensure IRIS' work is transparent, scientifically sound, and carried out in a timely and efficient manner.

I look forward to a productive and insightful discussion with our distinguished witnesses about the issues and challenges the IRIS Program faces, efforts IRIS has made in remedying them, and what remains to be done to ensure that IRIS lives up to its potential.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I yield back.