

A Message from the IRIS Program

September 2017

Many of you who follow the IRIS Program know that for the last several years we have continued to evolve our assessment practices to increase transparency and efficiency in the IRIS Program, its processes, and its products. Many of these practices have centered around the implementation and operationalization of systematic review methods.

Today, the IRIS Program is releasing draft documents that we are calling IRIS Assessment Plans (IAPs). These documents, similar to the scoping and problem formulation materials that the IRIS Program released in the past, represent recent efforts to more formally integrate systematic review into the existing IRIS scoping/problem formulation phase (part of Step 1 of the IRIS process). The IRIS Program will be holding a 30-day public comment period to ensure that stakeholders and the public have an opportunity to review and comment on IAPs for three chemicals: nitrate/nitrite, ethylbenzene, and chloroform.

An IAP is designed to fit the needs of EPA programs and regions. As such, each IAP was shaped in collaboration with these offices and is accordingly scaled so that the assessment will inform the decision-making needs of EPA – this “fit-for-purpose” approach will ensure that the products developed by the IRIS Program are relevant and timely. Importantly, IAPs are intended to reflect early public engagement on IRIS assessments, and do not represent the only opportunity for public input.

Because this is the first time we’re releasing scoping and problem formulation in the form of an IAP, we have decided to share them with the Science Advisory Board-Chemical Assessment Advisory Committee (SAB-CAAC) as part of an update on recent advances in the IRIS Program at a public meeting scheduled for September 27-28. We will dedicate a significant portion of the first day of this meeting to share how IRIS is currently implementing systematic review, with a particular focus on the role of the draft IAP in this process as well as additional practices we are implementing to enhance transparency during subsequent phases of developing a draft assessment. Feedback from the SAB-CAAC and the public will be used to finalize the IAPs before moving forward to develop chemical-specific assessment protocols, which will also be shared publicly, consistent with best practices in systematic review.

As the IRIS Program continues to evolve, we understand how important it is to communicate and engage with our stakeholders and the public early in the development of an assessment, and we are committed to ensuring that the IRIS process incorporates constructive scientific discussion that facilitates assessment development. Key to fulfilling this commitment is for the IRIS Program to build flexibility and efficiency into its processes. The IAPs and systematic review protocols are important components of this strategy and will provide greater transparency in the development of assessments. We look forward to your comments and input as the IRIS Program continues its work to provide high quality, transparent, scientific analyses that allow EPA to accomplish its mission.