



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

We conducted this review in response to an anonymous hotline allegation of unfair hiring practices at the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB). The complainant said CSB ignored standards of fairness and competition and “wired” recent supervisory positions for selected candidates. We sought to determine whether CSB had a sufficient pool from which to select candidates, and if CSB selected candidates in line with its Merit Promotion Plan.

Background

CSB reassigned three investigators to supervisory positions with promotion potential to the GS-15 level. Two other CSB employees had applied for the positions but were not selected. The positions fell under CSB’s Merit Promotion Plan, under which senior CSB officials rated and recommended candidates to select.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Liaison at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2007/20070604-2007-S-00001.pdf

U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board Did Not Adhere to Its Merit Promotion Plan

What We Found

CSB did not adhere to its Merit Promotion Plan during the process under which it reassigned three investigators to supervisory positions. CSB officials said they announced the supervisory positions in-house because successful candidates needed knowledge of CSB and its policies and procedures. One recommending official, who is also a member of CSB’s management council, said the management council knew who the best candidates were, but wanted a robust and objective selection process to ensure they made a fair decision. However, in our view, CSB used an overly subjective and inconsistent approach that did not adhere to its Merit Promotion Plan. CSB’s selection process did not emphasize experience as a factor, as required by the crediting plan under the Merit Promotion Plan. CSB did not apply several other requirements in its Merit Promotion Plan, including selection evaluation criteria. Further, recommending officials said they did not weight CSB experience heavily in the selection process. Not adhering to the Merit Promotion Plan suggested favoritism and the appearance of potential hiring offenses.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the CSB Chairman, for future promotions, evaluate candidates and manage the selection process in accordance with CSB policy. We also recommend that the Chairman update the Merit Promotion Plan. Further, we recommend that the Chairman clarify instructions on interview score sheets to ensure that the interview panel bases scores on information provided by the candidate during the interview process and not on personal knowledge of the candidate outside of the interview setting.

CSB generally concurred with the intent of our first recommendation, but CSB objected to the implication that it did not evaluate candidates and manage the selection process in accordance with CSB policy or with basic principles of fairness. CSB officials said they have already taken some actions to clarify CSB’s Merit Promotion Plan and will pursue others, although they did not address when they expect to complete these other actions. CSB fully concurred with our other two recommendations, but needs to provide an action plan that specifies milestones.