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EPA

Environmental Planning For The '80s

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Public indignation and Congressional concern about environmental problems grew stronger during the 1960's. Existing federal air and water pollution laws were strengthened several times. Nevertheless, most people believed that environmental problems could be solved through direct and discrete government actions while the rest of society continued business as usual.

It was not until the 1970's that we began to understand that solving environmental problems was more complex than simply placing "stoppers" on the main stacks and outfalls of industries and municipalities. We were finally ready to face the fact that urban and rural environmental problems cannot be separated, and stem from the random use and misuse of science and technology, from the way cities are built, from the way our transportation needs are met, from the way we extract resources, manufacture and distribute goods, dispose of wastes, —and significantly—from the way we think, about our relationship to the planet we inhabit.

This awakening produced far-reaching changes in our attitudes, habits, and institutions. Congress has greatly strengthened air and water pollution laws and has enacted major new laws to get to the root of environmental and related public health problems. These more recent laws and amendments reflect a new awareness of the fact that the manner in which our society conducts its private and public business —has far-reaching health, economic, and social implications and bears fundamentally on the essential integrity of ecological systems.

With this legislation in place, I believe we are now on the threshold of a new era in environmental protection. It will be an era in which the after-the-fact attempt at corrective action, which has characterized our approach to environmental problems in the past, will give way to an emerging imperative for before-the-fact techniques of resource management and public health protection. We need new interaction, communication, and cooperation among all levels of government which will require a level of effective planning effort far beyond anything we have seen.

Since becoming Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, I have encouraged unity in our environmental program efforts in general and in our planning efforts in particular. I have also been aware that in our zeal to address environmental concerns we must take care not to inhibit or deflect the intent of the separate environmental laws we implement. Many environmental problems are quite discretely different from others. For example, air pollution problems cannot be solved in precisely the same way as water pollution problems. But it is equally important to keep in mind that most environmental problems do overlap and ultimately merge with one another. Practical experience reminds us that certain proposed solutions to one problem may intensify another: Solutions to air pollution can increase solid waste problems, solutions to solid waste problems can create drinking water problems, and on and on.

To keep two apparently opposing ideas in mind and to continue functioning effectively is not easy for individuals or for institutions. Careful and creative planning efforts are needed to implement our individual laws and deal efficiently and comprehensively with the real world. These efforts take several forms and are intended to curtail inefficiency, encourage cooperation, decrease paperwork, generate common sense solutions to common problems, and release creative energies. The initiatives that we have taken include: regulatory reform, interagency coordination, the Carter administration's urban policy, and program integration.

Streamlining implementation. One major reform that may ultimately reshape the nature of environmental planning is the proposed Integrated Environmental Assistance Act. This act, recently submitted to Congress, would enable states to draw up integrated plans for two or more environmental programs. For example, a state could combine the separate planning processes for its air and water programs.

The act would simplify the task of applying for federal environmental grants (all EPA grant programs except those for wastewater treatment facilities could be integrated). It would permit the transfer of up to 20 percent of funds among programs and provide a supplementary $25 million as an incentive to innovation in state and local environmental programs. Most important, while maintaining continuity and current funding levels in our existing programs, the act would give states the ability to concentrate resources on their most pressing environmental problems.

Written agreements between EPA and the states represent another promising step toward creative solutions. These agreements are a flexible mechanism for the states and EPA to set environmental priorities and tailor specific actions to each state's needs. The agreements should offer several important benefits, including the opportunity for greater state initiative, improved management, and the integration of individual program efforts. Begun this fiscal year 1979, the agreements cover the various programs under the Clean Water Act. In 1980, programs carried out under the Safe Drinking Water and Resource Conservation and Recovery acts will be included. Following

that we will add programs conducted under the Clean Air Act. Thirty-one states had signed agreements by the end of March 1979.

We have also reduced or eliminated overlap among EPA's planning requirements. For example, we have eliminated 54 of the steps previously required in water quality management planning. We discovered that planners had been asked to cover the same ground two or three times! This example alone strongly suggests that there will be numerous opportunities for curtailing duplication as more programs are integrated.

Combining federal efforts. The early transportation control plans required under the Clean Air Act did not take sufficient account of the well-established transportation planning processes of state and local agencies, nor of the fact that not all state and local agencies had sufficient resources or time to carry out the required planning.

Underlying both issues was the fact that state and local agencies were confronted with uncoordinated transportation planning requirements from two federal agencies. Last June, EPA and the Department of Transportation (DOT) published guidelines for an integrated transportation-air quality planning process and agreed to joint review of plans and planning programs of mutual concern.

Furthermore, the Clean Air Act amendments provide state and local agencies with the opportunity, both in terms of additional time and funding, to develop local air quality implementation plans. They require control of virtually all types of significant emission sources. A critical element involves reducing transportation-caused pollution in major metropolitan areas. Rather than creating an additional planning process, we rely on existing DOT programs. Because of the importance of this program to continued economic development in major metropolitan areas, funds to assist local governments were requested in the President's urban policy message.

The program to insure that air quality needs are fully considered in transportation planning will be jointly administered by DOT and EPA. We will disburse funds of up to $50 million to designated local agencies through the existing Urban Mass Transit Administration (UMTA) Section 9 grant program in coordination with the "3C" transportation planning process. The grants are targeted at urban areas of greater than 200,000 population. Those with over one million people will receive emphasis because of heightened pollution levels, greater exposure rates, and more complex problems. The first of the grants, $129,050 for the Portland, Oregon, Metropolitan Service District, was announced in February.

Douglas Costle is Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Another EPA initiative of great interest to planners is our commitment to help recipients of water cleanup grants capture the public recreation benefits that wastewater treatment facilities can provide. To achieve this we are coordinating EPA step 1 construction grants and 208 planning processes with those of the Department of the Interior's State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans. This collaboration should encourage community involvement in coordinating water cleanup with recreation acquisition and shoreland protection, obtain multiple use of wastewater treatment facilities, and expand recreation and open space opportunities through "greenway" concepts.

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We have also arranged with HUD to coordinate environmental planning with land use plans developed under the Comprehensive Planning ("701") Program. Among other things, the two agencies have agreed to encourage the use of uniform data bases as well as common analytical techniques and criteria in establishing guidelines for their planning program.

Urban initiatives. In EPA we are improving our existing programs and developing new ones in support of the President's urban policy message. We want to make sure that the wastewater treatment program does not encourage wasteful sprawl. And we are reviewing our efforts to allow economic growth in areas that violate national air quality standards.

As the wastewater treatment program has matured, EPA has learned how construction of new treatment plants and placement of new interceptor sewer lines can influence development patterns. Plants designed with a large margin for growth may serve as an inducement to suburban sprawl, and interceptors that penetrate rural or lightly developed areas can open them up for intensive development.

We recently issued guidelines for the sewage treatment program designed to confront these tacit inducements for growth while still allowing well managed development. Among other things, the guidelines:

- preclude federal funding of wastewater treatment capacity beyond that determined to be cost effective;
- require states to disaggregate population projections based on state population figures which are consistent with those developed by the Bureau of Economic Analysis forecasts (Department of Commerce);
- call for strong emphasis on water conservation;
- discourage the use of costly and highly centralized treatment technologies where more cost-effective alternatives such as land application or treatment can do the job;
- discourage federal funding of interceptor lines into undeveloped areas, except where the lines are needed to deal with existing pollution problems.

These guidelines mean that funds for wastewater treatment will increasingly be spent where the need is greatest. For the most part, that means urban areas, and especially the urban core.

EPA has long recognized that urban areas bear a special burden in dealing with air quality issues.

Many urban areas have the most serious pollution problems. They also have disproportionately high unemployment and thus need to promote economic growth. To keep the need for economic growth from conflicting with the need for clean air, the agency established an emissions offset policy. Under this policy, an area can bring in new industry so long as pollution from *existing sources* is cut back by *more* than the amount the new plant will emit. Congress endorsed this policy when amending the Clean Air Act in 1977. Since then, EPA has expanded the opportunities connected with offsets. We now allow areas to "bank" emissions reductions. They can now build up credit for the pollution cutbacks stemming from reducing industrial emissions or auto pollution, and then draw on this credit when new industries come to the area or when existing industries want to expand.

From a planning perspective, one major benefit of banking is that it eliminates a major element of uncertainty. Under the original offset policy there was always the danger that required offsets could not be found when it came time to site a new plant. With banking, planners will know what air resources are available in much the same way that they now know what land, water, and energy resources are available.

A proposed urban assistance program will provide added support for cities to develop and test such approaches for achieving both economic development and clean air goals. The Air Quality Technical Assistance Demonstration Program is sponsored by four federal agencies: Commerce (Economic Development Administration), HUD, DOT, and EPA. Eight cities are receiving a total of $3.6 million in grants. The recipients are: Philadelphia; Chicago; Boston; Bridgeport/Waterbury, Conn.; Buffalo/Erie County; Portland, Oregon; Elizabeth, N.J.; and Minneapolis/St. Paul. Emissions banking programs are among the initiatives that these cities have included in their proposals.

Rural initiatives. New efforts much like those providing a new level of coherence and direction to policies affecting cities, are also focusing on the special needs and concerns of rural areas.

EPA has signed a far-reaching agreement on rural development with the Farmers Home Administration, the Economic Development Administration, the Community Services Administration, and the Labor Department.

The agencies have agreed to encourage the use of innovative and alternative forms of technology suited to the needs of small communities. EPA's wastewater treatment program is a prime example. The 1977 Clean Water Act Amendments now permit us to fund even those treatment projects that include individual septic systems, if they are the best and most economical way to deal with a community's treatment needs. This will keep wastewater treatment projects from imposing a heavy financial burden on smaller municipalities.

In another action of significance to rural areas, EPA has taken steps to insure that its programs will not accelerate the rapid conversion of agricultural lands to other uses. Under EPA's agricultural lands policy, all major agency program decisions that may lead to the permanent conversion of environmentally significant agricultural land—decisions, for example, on the funding of sewer lines across or into such land—must be examined in the light of their potential impact. Where there is the likelihood that environmentally significant farmland will be lost, we will reexamine our original decision and seek alternatives.

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Facing challenges. As a nation, we are now more sophisticated about environmental planning than we were in the early 1970's. Environmental planning requirements often posed a special challenge to the traditional concerns and expertise of the planning community. We have all gone through a painful period of transition while old ways of approaching problems, too often with little concern for the environment, have evolved to reflect a broader concern for the environmental soundness of our communities. A particularly good example is the effort over the last five years to integrate air quality considerations into transportation planning. Some members of the transportation planning community were not accustomed to dealing with some of the mass transportation considerations needed to reduce air pollution. In the past year I think we have made tremendous progress in overcoming these problems.

In other areas there are now legislated standards, technical support, and financial incentives to encourage environmental planning. The Safe Drinking Water Act supports local action to protect sole source aquifer drinking water supplies, just as the National Environmental Policy Act and the Clean Water Act's dredge and fill permit program support local wetland protection programs.

Environmental problems will continually pose new challenges to planners in areas that have heretofore been neglected. The tragedies of Buffalo's "Love Canal" and Louisville's "Valley of the Drums" are current reminders. Many other areas face health problems of crisis proportions because of improper hazardous waste disposal.

As we approach a new decade, planners face new challenges, particularly in the area of growth and environmental management. We must develop new tools to address problems of scarce environmental resources. In EPA we are already encouraging increased use of market mechanisms to supplement the traditional regulatory process. But planning techniques must still be developed for making decisions about allocation rules where markets are not feasible or desirable. And we need to fashion general rules under which the markets can serve to maintain environmental standards while preserving economic incentives.

Planners must address these challenges. Our society can have both environmental quality and economic development, without falling prey to the assumption that we can have only one or the other. The truth is, if we choose one and neglect the other, we will surely achieve neither.

More information. For more information on EPA's programs, contact:
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