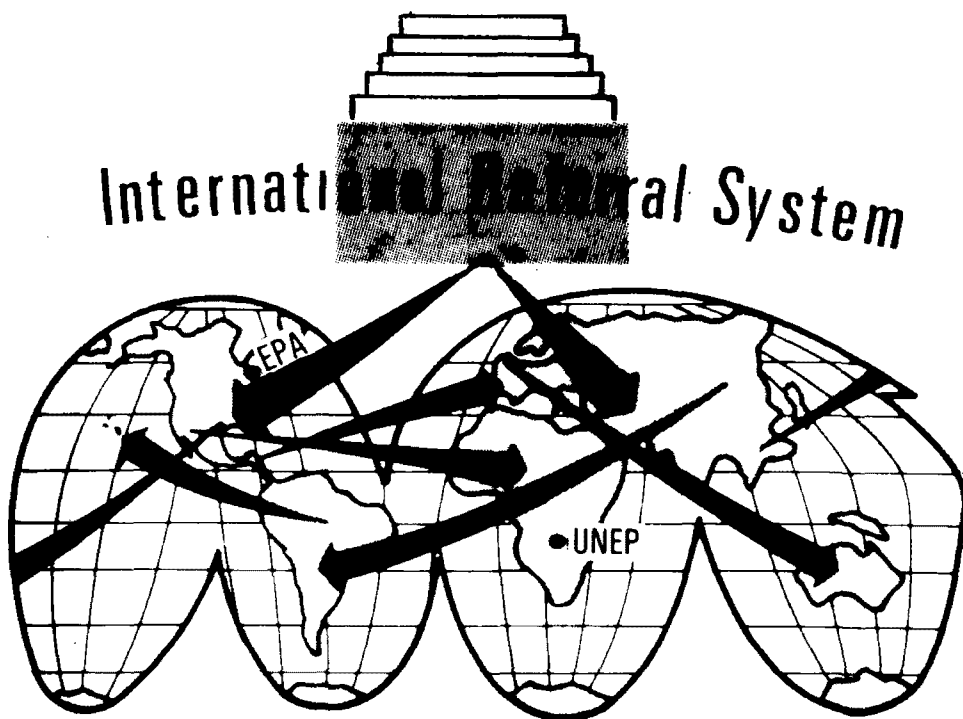


**UNITED
NATIONS
ENVIRONMENT
PROGRAM**

International Natural System



GENERAL INFORMATION

**U.S. NATIONAL FOCAL POINT
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
Washington, D.C. 20460**

**U.S. NATIONAL FOCAL POINT
for
UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT
PROGRAM INTERNATIONAL
REFERRAL SYSTEM**

(UNEP / IRS)

GENERAL INFORMATION

December 1975

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Region V, Library
230 South Dearborn Street
Chicago, Illinois 60604

**Office of Administration
Assistant Administrator for Planning & Management
U. S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**

International Referral System
United Nations Environment Program

INTRODUCTION

In June 1972, the International Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm, Sweden. As a result of this conference, the United Nations General Assembly in October 1972 established the United Nations Environment Program as an independent agency of the UN and designated Nairobi, Kenya as its headquarters.

Recommendation 101 of the Stockholm Conference called for the establishment of an international referral system which would link requesters of environmental information to the sources of that information. This recommendation was approved by the United Nations General Assembly at its October 1972 session, and the UNEP Governing Council scheduled a demonstration of the system for its meeting in Geneva, September 1974. In the interim a number of experts meetings were held and task forces established to define the mission and goals and an operating framework for the system. An effort was begun to staff the central offices in Nairobi and to develop a computer support system using the International Computing Center in Geneva.

The major operating concept of the International Referral System calls for a structure of national focal points each of which will be responsible for collecting sources of environmental information within that country, transmitting these sources in the appropriate format to the System's central directory, and serving as a point of contact for requesters of information through the system.

U. S. Role

Soon after the Stockholm Conference, the United States through the Department of State, established an interagency committee to serve as the U. S. Focal Point during the early planning and development phases in the development of the IRS. The Committee was made up of representatives of Government Departments and Agencies with major environmental programs.

The committee chairman, Mr. Melvin Day, represented the U. S. at the UNEP/IRS meetings. The Committee assisted the State Department in preparation of U. S. position papers relative to the System, and provided advice and assistance where it could, to the task forces and committees concerned with development of the IRS as an operating system.

The committee continues to operate as a coordinating body for IRS activities and as a review and guidance committee for the National Focal Point.

NATIONAL FOCAL POINT

As the International Referral System reached operational status, it was clear that the interagency committee, without resources at its disposal, could not continue to serve as the U. S. National Focal Point. In March 1975, the Department of State designated the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as the U. S. National Focal Point and on October 6, 1975, EPA formally opened its center at EPA Headquarters in Washington.

The responsibilities of the U. S. National Focal Point are:

1. Inventory of U. S. Organizations which will participate in IRS.
2. Prepare a National Directory of information sources to be included in the IRS International Directory.
3. Conduct a referral service to respond to requests from IRS users both within the U. S. and from other countries.

ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANTS

The U. S. National Focal Point has two levels of organizations in the referral system: subfocal points and sources.

(1) Subfocal point

Subfocal points consist of selected government agencies and non-governmental organizations which serve as parent organizations of several sources. An agency or organization is recommended by the National Focal Point and approved by the Interagency Committee before it is extended a formal invitation to become a subfocal point. Upon acceptance of the invitation the agency or organization assumes the responsibilities for the functions of a subfocal point.

The functions of a Subfocal point are to identify and register sources within its particular Agency on forms provided by USNFP; update descriptions of sources as needed and biannually as requested by USNFP; aid users and the USNFP in defining questions in areas of its special competence; assist in training UNEP/IRS fellows as properly requested by USNFP; assist in evaluating the system; and participate in special meetings on the International Referral System organized by the National Focal Point.

(2) Source

The National Focal Point accepts the International definition of a source as a single coherent body of information concerning a single aspect of the environment. A source may be an independent unit or part of an organization, or institution. Several sources may have the same parent organization.

The function of the source is to accept and respond to questions submitted to it through the International Referral System in an effective manner and to participate in evaluation of the system. Sources may raise questions, as well as submit questions for clients, to the United Nations Environment Program International Referral System.

Registration

Any organization or part of an organization which is a functional unit and has information or knowledge on a particular environmental topic or range of topics and is able and willing to provide appropriate information when requested to do so through the International Referral System may register as a source. Sources register on forms provided by the National Focal Point. These forms request the following information about a source: description, sponsorship, language, availability, output and output forms, and subject attribute.

The National Focal Point will compile a directory of registered sources for inclusion in the International Referral System Directory.

After a source is registered it assumes responsibility for all of the functions of a source in the International Referral System.

Senior Advisory Committee

A Senior Advisory Committee consisting of five well known Government officials with interest and background in environmental programs, provide objective advice on the role of the Focal Point from a national viewpoint.

COMPUTER SUPPORT

Source registration information is being entered into a computer system operated by the U. S. National Focal Point. From this national file, the Focal Point will be able to answer inquiries for U. S. Sources, issue national subject or organizational directories, and provide the UNEP/IRS Central Unit with a magnetic tape of U. S. sources.

The file contains addresses and contact points, a summary of the source, functions, and activities, language in which services are provided, what products are available from the sources, restrictions (if there are any), and subject index terms. The system may be searched by any of the descriptive elements and all of this information will be displayed in the international directory.

Each focal point which wishes to do so, may receive the international directory on computer tape and may use this file in lieu of transmitting questions to the UNEP/IRS Central Unit.

The International Computing Center operates an IBM 370/165. Programs supporting the International Referral System are written in PL-1 and Cobol.

USE OF SYSTEMS

The International Referral System is designed primarily to serve an international community of users. These users are expected to access UNEP/IRS through a national focal point or government agency which serves that function. The United States National Focal Point will serve the following community of users: National and local government agencies; business and industry; university and research institutions; special and professional organizations; and others concerned with environmental matters.

An individual user may access the U. S. National Focal Point through the local library or information center which normally serves as a source for environmental information in the area. In the absence of such a source, the individual may send the inquiry directly to the focal point.

Questions or inquiries should be written in the natural language of the subject. A user may specify requirements for information from a particular type of source (i. e., private, industry, government) or in a language other than English.

Upon receipt of the question the Focal Point searches the national and/or international directory computer files and furnishes the user with a listing of sources that are likely to provide the information requested. It is the responsibility of the user to contact the source or sources for the actual information.

All referral services are free to users. However, there probably will be a charge for substantive information. Any such charges or fees are arrived at by the user and the source, and conditions of mode of payment is their responsibility. The U. S. National Focal Point will not become involved in setting and collecting fees for substantive information.

The UNEP/IRS plans to evaluate its services, and improve upon them when necessary. Users are in the best position to contribute to such evaluation and sharpening of the service and from time to time will be requested to provide information on the effectiveness received from sources to which they are referred.

MAILING ADDRESS

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
401 M Street, S.W. (Room 2902)
Washington, D. C. 20460

CABLE ADDRESS

EPAWSH (TLX # 892758)

TELEPHONE NUMBER

A. C. 202 755-1836
1837
1838

HOURS OF OPERATION

8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
daily Monday thru Friday
except holidays

DATE DUE

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