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Administrator Carol M. Browner
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
401 M Street, S.W. (Mail Code 1101)
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Browner:

I am pleased to forward to you the enclosed Final Report of the Environmental Information and Public Access Committee (EIPAC), a Committee of the National Advisory Council for Environmental Policy and Technology (NACEPT).

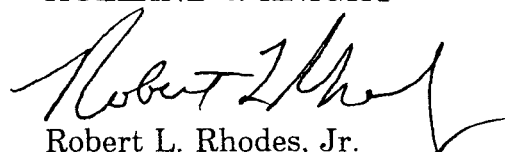
This report responds to your request that the EIPAC consider Agency information policy and infrastructure issues and provide recommendations to improve Agency decision-making, accountability, and public access to data.

The Committee was able to provide the "real-time" advice on public access initiatives currently under way through the Center for Environmental Information and Statistics (CEIS), including recommendations on how the CEIS could improve its Web-Site. Those recommendations are included in this Report. While the Committee was also charged with providing advice on broader Agency information policy and infrastructure issues, shortly after the Committee was launched the Agency announced a major initiative to restructure its information management function. As a result, the Committee was asked to defer deliberations regarding those issues pending completion of the Agency's initiative.

I hope you will find this report useful as EPA continues to work toward improved public access to environmental information. The EIPAC, and the NACEPT Council welcome your review and response to their work.

Sincerely,

HOLLAND & KNIGHT



Robert L. Rhodes, Jr.
Chair, NACEPT

**NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY AND TECHNOLOGY (NACEPT)**

**ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION AND
PUBLIC ACCESS COMMITTEE (EIPAC)**

**April 1998 - August 1998
REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

April 28, 1999

NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND TECHNOLOGY (NACEPT)

ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION AND PUBLIC ACCESS COMMITTEE (EIPAC)

April 1998 - August 1998

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to document the activities, deliberations, and recommendations of the 1998 - 1999 National Advisory Council for Environmental Policy and Technology's (NACEPT) Environmental Information and Public Access Committee (EIPAC).

The EIPAC evolved from prior information management advisory committees housed under NACEPT. While each committee over the years assessed a variety of information management issues, the increasing use of technology within EPA continually created new and more complex issues, necessitating the value of continued information management assessment within the NACEPT process. Examples of recommendations submitted to the Agency over the past 4 - 5 years from the information committees include:

- strategic planning for management of EPA's information resources;
- better access to and dissemination of EPA's data and information;
- more and better integration of environmental information;
- development and use of environmental statistics; and
- strengthening the Agency's CIO position, its mission and authority.

During the tenure of the 1998 Environmental Information and Public Access Committee, the Agency announced (August 1998) and unfolded (December 1998) a major reorganization initiative for comprehensive information management. As a result, the Agency's information managers were focused on reorganization activities. While many of the changes considered by the Agency were based on recommendations from prior NACEPT information committees, EIPAC was encouraged to delay making further recommendations until the reorganization process was complete. This report is a summary of discussions that took place prior to the announcement of reorganization.

The original charge developed for the EIPAC (see Appendix 1) was intentionally broad to encompass statistical interpretation and uses of data as well as broad information policy and infrastructure issues. The goal was to address information management concepts that would enhance decision-making, accountability, and public access to data. Some of these issues were addressed by earlier committees as separate topics. However, there was recognition that information management is a continually evolving process and that EPA could benefit from the

broad perspectives of external users of EPA data. These perspectives are invaluable to EPA's ability to intelligently manage its information and maintain technology relevance.

Two EIPAC meetings were held prior to the announcement of the comprehensive information management initiative at EPA. During these meetings, committee members identified aspects of the charge that could benefit from immediate input from stakeholders. In addition, the Agency requested the Committee focus its initial efforts on EPA's newly established Center for Environmental Information and Statistics (CEIS). The EIPAC then concentrated on:

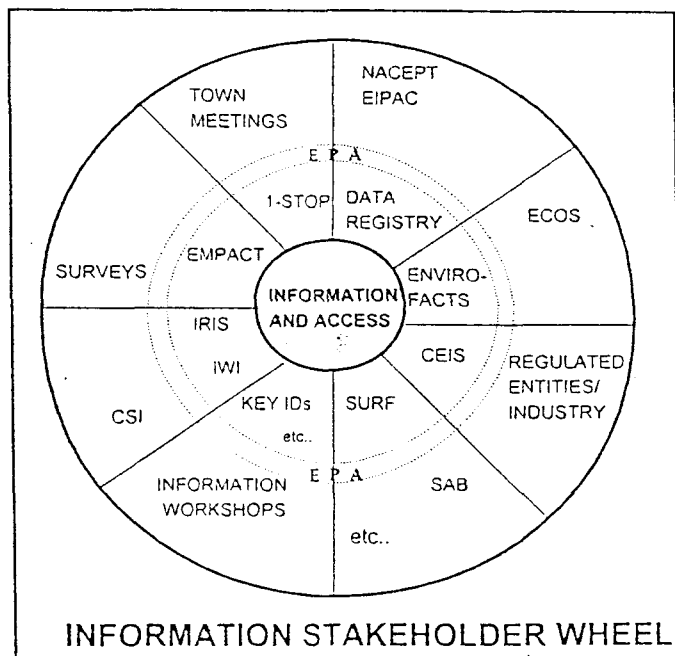
- goals for CEIS;
- the CEIS customer survey and its results;
- access to environmental data and information through CEIS; and
- the relationship of CEIS to the overall Agency information management framework and its budget.

The committee discussed the following issues and developed the recommendations presented here for the Agency's consideration.

SUMMARY OF DELIBERATIONS

EPA managers provided committee members with an overview of information management at EPA and presented several examples of public access and information management projects. During their initial discussion of information management issues, members indicated their hope that EIPAC recommendations would have measurable impacts on the Agency and that EPA would attempt to measure these effects and subsequently provide feedback to stakeholders. EIPAC members also felt that several of the issues identified during the presentations were duplication of subjects being addressed by other advisory committees. The committee understood its role as one "spoke on the wheel" of many stakeholder groups that advise the Agency (See Information Stakeholder Wheel). Therefore, the EIPAC wanted to avoid duplication of efforts.

The EIPAC members identified three information issues relevant to EPA that would benefit from additional stakeholder input. These issues pertain to CEIS and other



Agency information programs:

- Data Quality
- Public Access and Use
- Intergovernmental Coordination.

Initially the committee expected to address these issues in separate workgroups. However the members realized that the issues were very interrelated and relevant for all members' input.

SUMMARY OF EIPAC ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Issues of both substance (see above) and process (how to effectively advise the Agency) were of major concern to the members. In addition, the committee members felt that a dialog with key senior managers of EPA's IRM offices was essential for effective development of recommendations for the Agency.

In response to a request from EPA to address CEIS issues, the Committee examined the context of CEIS in: a) public access initiatives, b) data suitability, data gaps, data quality, and c) the overall management of EPA information and information resources. As a result, the committee offered the following comments and recommendations to CEIS and other IRM programs:

A. Public access initiatives:

The CEIS and other information projects must be sensitive to the need to provide information to the public in a variety of media and methods. Not all segments of society have access to computers. CEIS should have available paper documents, videos, ad campaigns, etc. - all of which contribute to providing environmental information to the various segments of America's population. CEIS should consider having state/local "branch" offices or partners.

A review of the CEIS website generated the following comments:

- A web site and other documents should be provided in other languages, especially Spanish;
- Distribution of information would be most cost-effective at local levels; a web site should be developed with a centralized, primary source of data/information that could be printed or down loaded at local libraries, universities, labs, etc.
- The CEIS website address should be added to other web sites for linkages.

The Committee offered the following goals for CEIS and other public access projects within EPA:

- Enhance community capacity to participate in environmental decisions;
- Understand how data are used in decision making - internal to EPA and also to local communities, businesses, and industry who use the data for their decisions on environmental issues and quality;

- Increase data use in empowering communities and community development/consensus processes.

B. Data suitability and data gaps:

The Committee recommended that:

- data limitations be explained in various ways to a variety of audiences who may, or may not, be familiar with statistics;
- IRM planning and management be more centralized to ensure consistent data standards and compatibility with secondary uses;
- CEIS should take the lead in developing standards and types of data collected.

The Committee agreed to continue to review the process and findings of the CEIS data gaps/suitability study.

C. CEIS within EPA's overall management of information and information resources:

The Committee members suggested that CEIS should develop a more detailed and organized work plan. They suggested that the plan include current and proposed budget information for each of the CEIS programs. Plans should also include the CEIS budget and goals in context with the overall EPA IRM budget and goals.

The CEIS should develop a 3 - 5 year marketing plan. The plan should address CEIS as a "national referral center" of environmental information or a federal "environmental information broker." This would help establish its role in managing environmental information across and in cooperation with other federal agencies.

The members repeatedly and strongly suggested the need for consistency across information programs and policies. An evaluation of major information projects and policies across the Agency would help place the CEIS in context for its role in the Agency.

D. Other Agency issues:

The Committee recognized that progress has been made in the Agency in many of these areas. But they also felt that efforts made by information management and program staff are compromised by a lack of coordination, duplication, and competing or diminishing resources. Members voiced the need for the Agency to identify where EPA's various IRM functions reside and the organizational design needed to most efficiently manage information. Members requested an explanation of the extent of the authority the CIO has over agency-wide data policy. They also urged the Agency to continue to elevate IRM management issues to senior level managers.

To better understand EPA's information issues, activities, and approach to information management, the Committee developed the following matrix, with the intent to "fill in the blanks" in subsequent EIPAC meetings:

#	Issue Area	Responsible Office	What is EPA doing?	What is Needed?	Recommendations
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Accuracy/ Quality Standards ▸ Data Integration ▸ Data Quality & Redundancies/gaps ▸ Reporting Burden/efficiencies ▸ Examination of Info collected 	OIRM/Project Offices/ Regional Offices/States	REI?	Accurate Data/100% current	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▸ Respond to Customer Needs ▸ Diversity of Dissemination 				
3	Regional/State/Local Roles				
4	Public Involvement/ Process/Policy/ Methodology				
5	Accountability Mechanisms/ Performance Measures				

The matrix provided a prioritization of IRM issues that the Committee members wanted to address in subsequent meetings. It also provided an opportunity to identify who within the Agency is responsible for those issues and activities. The matrix included an area for additional development of EIPAC recommendations. Because the work of the EIPAC was curtailed shortly after this initial matrix was developed, the Committee did not refine the matrix, nor were they able to add detailed recommendations.

UNFINISHED EIPAC BUSINESS

The above matrix provides a structure of issues for deliberation by future information management advisory committees. The Committee strongly feels that ongoing stakeholder involvement (advisory committees being one mechanism) is essential to improving and maintaining data quality and public access to EPA's environmental data.

- ★ *The Committee recommends that an ongoing information management advisory committee be established to provide advice and recommendations to EPA and its new organization for comprehensive information management.*

APPENDIX 1

Charge of the Environmental Information and Public Access Committee

**CHARGE FOR THE 1998
ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION
AND PUBLIC ACCESS COMMITTEE (EIPAC)
of the**

National Advisory Council for Environmental Policy and Technology

BACKGROUND.

Since 1993, several of NACEPT's committee activities have been focused on EPA information access and dissemination processes, and on issues directly related to the development and use of environmental statistics. Three separate NACEPT committees (NACEPT IRM Task Force; Ecosystems Information & Assessments Committee; Information Impacts Committee) have addressed components of EPA's IRM processes. Additionally, the Environmental Statistics Committee of NACEPT has been providing advice to the Agency for several years on the development, use, and quality of environmental statistics.

Much of the information management and environmental statistics work produced by NACEPT has been invaluable to the agency as it developed and implemented an agencywide IRM strategic plan, Community-Based Environmental Protection (CBEP) strategies, and its new Center for Environmental Information and Statistics (CEIS). NACEPT has been instrumental in providing stakeholder insights and sound advice as EPA commenced development of these initiatives and concepts.

Now that the IRM strategic planning process, CBEP, and the CEIS have become a permanent part of the Agency's operations, the need for a different level of stakeholder input must be defined. To that end, three of NACEPT's current advisory bodies (IIC, CBEP, ES) focusing on information management, community-based environmental protection, and environmental statistics, should be examined, and where possible, merged. Similarly, the charges for these three committees having been met, a new charge should evolve that more accurately reflects where EPA is in its information management processes, and brings together concepts no longer needing to be separately examined and assessed.

CHARGE.

With the creation of the Center for Environmental Information and Statistics, as well as with the the implementation of an agencywide IRM strategic plan, EPA is now better positioned to take a more holistic view of issues involving environmental information and public access. As EPA continues development of the tools necessary to support its legislative mandates, as well as the tools necessary to provide stakeholders with environmental information that can support their decision-making processes, various issues need to be addressed. Some of those issues include:

1. A holistic approach to information collection, management, dissemination, and integration.
2. Access to, and validation of environmental statistics.

3. The Long-term role of the Center for Environmental Information & Statistics and how it fits within the Agency's current information management model.
4. Updating EPA IRM Strategic Plan.
5. Public Access to information.
6. The Role of the CIO in EPA.
7. Implementation of Legislation in EPA (Paperwork Reduction Act; Government Performance & Results Act; etc.)
8. Effective implementation of Environmental Monitoring for Public Access & Community Tracking (EMPACT) within the Agency's information management model.

Although all of the issues identified above are critical, the CEIS is scheduled to open its doors in January, 1998. Because of that accelerated schedule, the committee will be asked to focus its initial efforts on the CEIS (issue #3). Specifically, the members are asked to focus on the following:

- a. Examine and provide input regarding the CEIS' long-term goals and objectives. Specifically:
 - i. Do they complement the CEIS' Mission & Vision?
 - ii. Are they complete?
 - iii. Are they realistic?
- b. Address and recommend how the CEIS should fit within the Agency's current Information Management Model.
- c. Address and recommend measures of success for the Center, including:
 - i. Short and long-term milestones
 - ii. Measures of success/progress
- d. Address and recommend a process to support a continuous stakeholder involvement.

Beyond that initial focus, the committee will be asked to address the other seven issues identified, and provide recommendations to the agency. The committee, supported and managed by the Office of Cooperative Environmental Management (OCEM), will work closely with the Office of Policy, Planning, and Evaluation (OPPE), as well as the Office of Administration and Resources Management (OARM), in meeting its charge. The committee will develop a report that will be submitted to the Administrator, as well as the Assistant Administrators for OPPE and OARM, identifying both issues and recommendations.

APPENDIX 2

Membership of the Environmental Information and Public Access Committee (1998-1999)

**Members of the 1998
National Advisory Council for Environmental Policy and Technology
Environmental Information and Public Access Committee**

Designated Federal Officer: Ms. Deborah Ross
401 M Street, SW, 1601-F
Washington, DC 20460

Mr. Gerard Bulanowski (Chair)
Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
Denver, CO

Dr. Robert Ford
Southern University and A & M College
Baton Rouge, LA

Dr. Michel Gelobter
Rutgers University
Newark, NJ

Mr. Mark Greenwood
Ropes & Gray
Washington, DC

Mr. Manuel Hernandez
National Hispanic Environmental Council
Riverside, CA

Ms. Patricia Hill
Georgia-Pacific Corporation
Washington, DC

Ms. Linda Hixon
North Chickamauga Creek Conservancy
Chattanooga, TN

Dr. Lois Kaufman
Environmental Research Associates
Princeton, NJ

Mr. Walter McLeod
American Petroleum Institute
Washington, DC

Dr. Janet Norwood
Urban Institute
Chevy Chase, MD

Mr. Guillermo Rodriguez, Jr.
Latino Issues Forum
San Francisco, CA

Mr. Edward Spar
Council of Professional Associations on Federal Statistics
Alexandria, VA

Ms. Lori Sundstrom
City of Phoenix
Phoenix, AZ

Ms. Nancy Tosta (Co-Chair)
Puget Sound Regional Council
Seattle, WA

Dr. Linda J. Young
University of Nebraska
Lincoln, NE