A Unified Approach to Improving EPA's Web Site

EPA's Web site is one of the most important ways we provide our public with environmental information. It is fundamental to every Agency program and initiative. The site contains over 900,000 pages, reaching a diverse audience of students of all ages, regulated businesses, and scientists, to name just a few. We reach over three million unique visitors every month, and up-to-date content, intuitive navigation, and ease of use are critical factors to ensure our varied readers find the information they need.

Although EPA has done a wonderful job of developing the agency's site to provide information about our major programs and initiatives, feedback from our users tells us that:

- The Web site's navigation is too complicated
- It is difficult to find information through our search engine
- The Web site contains links that are broken, labeled incorrectly, or misdirect users

Why can't users find the information they need?

Currently, each Program Office and Region implements its own business processes and suite of tools for managing its Web pages. The multiple approaches to creating, managing, and publishing Web pages result in:

- Navigational confusion and inconsistency across the site
- Broken links
- A site that is based on internal organizational structure rather than topic-oriented content
- Stove-piped, inconsistent, and outdated content

How are we improving the navigation and usability of the EPA Web site?

The Office of Environmental Information and the Office of Public Affairs released a joint memorandum on April 14, 2008, to EPA senior management announcing an initiative to develop and implement a Web Information Architecture and Web Content Management System. These initiatives will improve the delivery of environmental information to EPA stakeholders by significantly improving the Web site's navigation and enhancing access to information.

What is Web Information Architecture and how will it improve EPA.gov?

Information Architecture (IA) for the Web is the art and science of organizing and labeling Web content so that users can navigate a site and easily find the information they need.   A Web IA is essentially a "card catalog" for the content on a Web site. By providing a single methodology for categorizing information across EPA, an IA will help us to better organize our information for a broad set of audiences with disparate needs and skills.

What is a Web Content Management System and how will it improve EPA.gov?

A Web Content Management System (CMS) is software for the creation, management, organization, and publication of Web content. Adopting a Web CMS will allow us to manage and control our large and dynamic collections of Web material. A Web CMS can provide:

- Automation of Web management and publication, and reduction in labor needs
- Storage of all EPA's Web content in a single repository
- Elimination of redundant content
- Easy creation and management of content by a broader group of subject matter experts

What are the benefits of the Web IA and Web CMS?

The Web IA and the Web CMS will improve the overall quality of EPA's Web site, with the following benefits:

- Improved navigation and ease of use for our diverse audiences
- Information that is easy to find, accessible, relevant, accurate, timely and complete
- Improved search results from both EPA's search engine and external search engines
- Content that is topic-based
- Reduced Web maintenance costs
- Improved link management and great reduction in the number of broken links

How will these initiatives be implemented and what does my office need to do?

The Agency's Web Council has formed a workgroup with representatives from Program Offices and Regions to develop a high-level Web Information Architecture Framework. The initial phase is scheduled to be completed by December 2008. The Web CMS migration is currently underway, with mass migration to start in March, 2009. As the Web IA and Web CMS are being developed and implemented, Web staff in Program Offices and Regions will be asked:

- To "clean house" by identifying redundant, outdated, or trivial web content (ROT) and then to remove or update this content,saving records as appropriate.
- Using the new IA Framework, help to organize the information on the local (regional or program office) site into topical categories within the framework.
- To categorize all content and move all appropriate information into the Web CMS – Fall of 2008 through 2010
- To attend the Web CMS training as it is offered

For more information about the Web IA or Web CMS contact Susan Fagan or Judy Dew or John Shirey
Visit: https://kestrel.rtpnc.epa.gov/webwiki/index.php/WebCMS_Migration