



May 16, 2006

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Jeffords
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Boxer and Jeffords:

We are writing to convey the deep concerns of the library community about the proposed cut of up to \$2 million in the FY 2007 budget of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that could well, if implemented, result in the closure of the EPA Headquarters Library as well as many of EPA's 27 regional and laboratory libraries. Additionally, half of the FY2006 serials budget, \$500,000 out of \$1 million, has been cut from the budget of the Office of Administration and Resources Management.

These changes will make it more difficult for the agency's policymakers and the public to leverage the extensive, accurate knowledge found in these libraries. This information is essential to important decisions that affect the environment and difficulties in finding and using it potentially compromises the public's health.

Since its creation in the early 1970s, EPA has been a key source of essential information for the general public, for researchers across the country, and for the agency's own scientists and staff, from whom the libraries handle more than 134,000 research requests each year. The libraries house unique collections, including an estimated 50,000 one-of-a-kind primary source documents that are available nowhere else.

It is not just EPA's staff and scientists who use this material, of course. Marcia Olson, from Stoughton, Massachusetts writes, "I have been an information specialist in the environmental field for 20 years and without a doubt, the information services provided by the EPA library system are among the best of any government agency I have used. It is a tremendous resource for environmental science, toxicology, risk assessment and pollution topics which are vital for our nation to combat the complex environmental problems we face today. As an environmental librarian whose firm works closely with the EPA and with companies who must comply with environmental regulations, not having access to these vital materials would be so detrimental to our ability to practice sound science and prudent decision making."

Ruth Liddy, a librarian for an environmental consulting firm in Cambridge, Massachusetts writes, "I use the EPA libraries on a regular basis to obtain documents that are often not available anywhere else. In particular, their collections are the only ones to include numerous technical background documents from the earliest regulatory initiatives of the 1960's and 1970's that are often critical in current litigation or site remediation liability allocation. Closure of the EPA libraries, and the resulting loss of access to these regulatory records, will have a substantial negative impact on my company and many other parties involved in the environmental arena."

In a meeting between EPA staff and the library associations, it was indicated that the agency is committed to digitizing all unique materials and that they are reviewing how to phase-in that process. They do not, however, have either a business plan or a timeline for doing so. In the interim, significant resources are likely to be put in real risk of loss.


The EPA's regional libraries serve the public with collections that are specifically tailored to meet the needs of constituents by geographic region—such as mining in Colorado and wetlands in Maryland. If these regional libraries close, as they almost certainly will if the proposed budget cuts are approved, it will become extremely difficult—and in some cases impossible—for constituents and even EPA staff to find reliable information on sensitive environmental issues. The negative impact on public access to government information will be enormous.

As an example of what is at risk here, in the late 1980's or early 1990's, the EPA library in San Francisco sent many of its reports and documents to Hawaii. The University of Hawaii Library speculated that perhaps the library got them from another EPA library or office and they were duplicates; they were under the impression that a library had closed and Hawaii was getting their collection. Over a period of years, the University of Hawaii added the documents to their collection. They found that many of them were not in OCLC (Online Computer Library Center), nor were they listed in EPA Index, so the University did original cataloging on them and uploaded the records to OCLC. In many cases, University of Hawaii was the only library listed in OCLC as owning these materials. The October 2004 flood in Hawaii destroyed about 85% of University of Hawaii's EPA documents, including most of those that they got from the EPA library in California. Where or if this material is available anywhere else is not clear, but it would only be in EPA libraries.

The American Library Association, the American Association of Law Libraries and the Special Libraries Association have a long-standing commitment to promoting free public access to government information and we are troubled by what seems to be an accelerating trend in increased restrictions on access to government information. Individuals and communities need to be able to find high quality, accurate information about issues that concern them, such as the health and safety of their families and communities. Our members, your constituents, know firsthand how important the EPA library collections and services are to the American public.

We encourage you to question Ms. Molly O'Neil about what she will do to restore this most important American resource, the reports and collections of environmental information being stored, catalogued and made accessible by EPA's regional libraries and professional librarians.

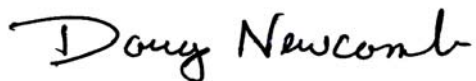
Sincerely,



Mary Alice Baish, Associate Washington Affairs Representative
American Association of Law Libraries



Emily Sheketoff, Executive Director
American Library Association – Washington Office



Douglas Newcomb, CAE
Chief Policy Officer
Special Library Association