



Transition Statement: Improved Information Access at the EPA

The Special Libraries Association (SLA) is a nonprofit global organization for innovative information professionals and their strategic partners. SLA serves more than 11,000 members in 75 countries in the information profession, including corporate, academic, and government information specialists, and fosters global access to information for creative, research, and educational uses.

EPA leads the nation's environmental science, research, education and assessment efforts. To fulfill its mission of protecting human health and the environment, the EPA must provide not only the agency's staff, but the general public, with access to its important environmental information.

The Obama administration should drive the EPA's leadership toward more innovation in the management and dissemination of information created by its work over time. At a time when management of information assets is widely recognized as critical, the EPA's investment in the infrastructure and management of information has not met the expectations of scientists or the public. Although the EPA has recently reopened the libraries it shuttered in 2006--after massive complaints from the public, organizations, and Senate hearings and directives--the sense that the current administration's goal was to suppress access to environmental and public health related information prevails.

Under the Obama administration, the EPA should strive to epitomize transparency in information access so that their valuable information assets can be freely used for the benefit of EPA scientists, private citizens, and business to advance society and humankind as a whole.

EPA should invest in an innovative information management strategy that leverages technology to its fullest extent and at the same time utilizes the expertise of information professionals who understand the diverse needs of various audiences and who know how to collect, analyze and disseminate information to promote accurate decision making.

The potential restructuring of any the federal government's information resources must be open and transparent. Whether expanding services or scaling them back, the EPA (as well as all federal agencies) should be required to develop impact statements that clearly address advantages and disadvantages of the proposed change, as well as viable alternatives for maintaining information access before any action is taken. This did not occur in 2006 when the EPA began to close its libraries. It is imperative that such an undertaking occur in order to avoid short-sighted budget driven moves and potential long term information damage. The fate of EPA's information and resources is far too important to the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of this country to be decided by a select few.

For further information, please contact me or SLA Chief Policy Officer Doug Newcomb (dnewcomb@sla.org).

Sincerely,

Janice R. Lachance
Chief Executive Officer