

**EPA Responses to Public Comment and Suggestions
Q4/2010 Open Government Progress Report Component**

Category of Comment	Full Comment	EPA's Response
Include a Non-retaliatory Clause	I'd like to see a non-retaliatory clause added to this OpenEPA statement. In the general business world such things are standard in Whistle Blower policies--those that help expose fraud and illegal acts within a company. I recognize that being able to simply talk about one's research should not be linked with illegal acts, but the reality of retaliation occurring when someone breaks with an organization's culture (of perhaps minimal transparency) is all too real. A non-retaliatory clause would protect speakers and improve transparency.	EPA's hotline and whistleblower protection provisions can be found at: http://www.epa.gov/oi/gohline.htm . EPA's Office of the Inspector General also has a hotline that allows secure, anonymous reporting of fraud, waste, or abuse. This comment is related to one addressed in the Q3/2010 Open Government Progress Report where EPA stated we would begin evaluating how agency staff interact with the public and how EPA's OpenGov program can add greater degrees of clarity to issues surrounding those interactions. EPA will track this suggestion and provide any status change or additional information in future progress reports.
Improve Ability to Find Information on EPA's Website	I just spent half an hour to get to this point. I have been trying to find an answer to a simple question about water quality for 8 hrs! One website to another which sends you back to the first one. 10 phone numbers. One of which, the lady said "I don't even know why they told you to call me. I am not a water quality expert". I just can't believe that it is IMPOSSIBLE to find public record information either online or with maybe 2-3 phone calls. Open.... maybe some dept should look up the definition of that word.	EPA is actively trying to improve how we deliver information. The public and our partners have suggested we change our Website to make finding information easier. We also collect and analyze web statistics that help indicate how people are looking for information which informs us of the most requested information and the terms being used by the public. We are currently working to revamp our Website and present information based on a topic or audience to help simplify and aid discovery. Please watch for changes over the next few months, and we encourage your feedback.
Add More Raw Data; Improve Ways to Access and Understand the Data	The agency should continue the process begun with the launch of data.gov and identify priority datasets that should be made easily available to the public in numerous electronic formats (and in paper form for those with restricted computer access), with the goal of the eventual release of all data sets in the agency's possession. The agency should also include in its open government plan a schedule for making all data indexed and searchable, and ensuring that descriptions of the data (metadata) are easily accessible.	EPA identified and posted additional data sets in our OpenGov Plan V1.0 and V1.1. We are developing our Strategic Data Action Plan (SDAP) which will address data gaps and the prioritization process of making information available. There are a number of considerations that Agencies must account for prior to releasing data. These include confidential business, personal identity, other sensitivities as well as federal requirements under the Quality Guidelines of 2002. These considerations must be sufficiently addressed to reduce inaccuracies or nefarious activities. EPA's SDAP will identify where these requirements and other considerations should be accounted for in the process of making data searchable from Data.gov.
Make All Data Available and Organized Online to Foster New Uses	All new data, as well as all previously collected data, from every EPA study possible should be available online for download. It should be easily sortable by date published, type of data, etc. The data should be able to be presented in such a way that it could be used in new and unique ways. For instance, if data about pollution levels was geotagged and tied in with data from Health and Human Services, maybe new trend about pollution and health could be spotted. Or if doctors could bring up the data when looking at a person's history in terms of where they've lived, the doctor could do a risk assessment in terms of cancer risks etc. Another possible outcome is that individuals poring over data for unique reasons or in unique ways could spot things that officials in the EPA didn't realize connected.	EPA will address the life cycle of data including archiving in our forthcoming Data Policy. The Strategic Data Action Plan (SDAP), also in development, is focused on data that will be made public and the process to make the data available on Data.gov.
Improve EPA's Web Presence	EPA needs to create a streamlined, transparent web presence. People go to the EPA website for two reasons 1) They have a specific question or topic in mind that they want to explore and 2) They are generally curious to find out about EPA, what it's doing, and what it's all about. The first group of people enters EPA.gov hoping to find out about a specific regulation or program and is confronted with a fragmented, disorganized, non navigable website. Finding any specific information often requires upwards of 5 mouse clicks, a far cry from the "one click" standard set by many media organizations and news outlets. The purpose of having a web presence is to make information sharing EASY. Right now, this is a major FAIL for EPA. Imagine an EPA website where all articles, features, materials, and information are typically tagged and searchable. Where typing in "water quality", for example, would bring up a hit list categorized into bins: water quality regulations, water quality stories/articles, water quality news/press releases, etc. Where typing in "OAGPS", "NAAGS", or any of the plethora of acronyms in the Agency would send you directly to that divisions website, or topic definition. The use of tagging/metadata is just one step on the long road toward streamlining information access at EPA.gov... but it is an important step to make. Across the entangled web of microsites and cross-referenced pages at EPA.gov, pervasive tagging could help users quickly sort through the heaps and find what they are looking for. The second group of people that stumble upon EPA.gov want to know what EPA is all about. The trick here is capturing the interest of someone who may be pretty unfamiliar with EPA. Capturing interest, drawing people in... this needs to be a priority. It is not enough to use the web as a dumping ground for whatever we happen to create in the course of conducting business as usual at EPA. Materials and information placed on the web need to be generated with specific audiences in mind and with an eye to what messages are being conveyed, and how. When people go to a website and return to it as a source for information, they seek a constantly updating, streaming source of UP-TO-DATE information, presented in an ENGAGING and RELIABLE way. It's a high standard, but we must achieve it. Having a twitter account that automatically spouts out headlines from a blog is useless if nobody knows about the blog in the first place... and even more useless if people know about the blog... and don't find it interesting. Step 1 was to create these "New Media" outlets, and to encourage multimedia materials on the web. Step two is to put out QUALITY content FREQUENTLY, and RELIABLY. Generally, people don't really care what a random person thinks about a random topic, or what some EPA worker from some region has to say about their feelings on climate change. People want fact-based information, presented in an interesting way, from a source they trust. In order to gain an audience's trust, EPA needs to be a reliable source of easy-to-access and easy-to-understand information. Here are some ideas to help achieve this goal: - Update EPA.gov as WELL as ALL microsites within EPA.gov on a frequent and regular basis (read: AT LEAST ONCE A DAY). There should be NO old or out-of-date information on a government website. That there is currently so much on EPA.gov is a huge embarrassment and degrades our credibility vastly. - All text materials should include accompanying photographs of what the text is specifically referring to. Photos should as often as possible be REAL photos of ACTUAL things--not stock images of actors dressed up as scientists or random test tubes in a generic laboratory. People do not trust this, it looks staged and fake. Photos should include captions so that readers understand what they are looking at and to provide context. - Use New Media tools to post information and stories that are engaging and newsworthy. Personal feelings of EPA staff do not count unless they are especially insightful or outlandish. People want to know: What big meetings are going on at EPA and why do they matter? What is EPA's response to recent newsworthy events (Haiti, the Endangerment Finding, etc)? What exciting new projects are going on at EPA and why are they exciting? Human interest stories are sometimes appropriate... as long as they are actually interesting! Some examples of proper human interest stories: A 100 yr old scientist at EPA who is still making scientific breakthroughs, a new discovery that a previously endangered species is now overpopulated, or a major regulatory success that has saved lives or improved health of diseased children. - Bragging about accomplishments is good (and necessary) but readers are rightfully wary of too much self-praise. When people come to EPA.gov and see a nameless, faceless writer touting breakthrough findings, cutting edge science, and exciting new things... why should they believe that any of this is true? People don't instinctively trust the government, the government needs to earn it. One way to increase transparency is to have a "Meet the Team" page where EPA staff can introduce themselves, share their backgrounds, and show their faces.	The public and our partners suggested we change our Website to make it easier to find information. We are actively working to revamp our Website, presenting information based on a topic or audience. In addition the search feature has been updated and will continue to be modified to meet the needs of visitors to EPA's website.
Educate	Start with education in elementary school by creating a sign cant resonounding effect, like the popularity of a spelling bee, with a lot more intensity towards old hazardous patterns. Most citizen of this country don't know the difference between dust and friable asbestos, shame on us!	EPA supports a significant environmental education effort that starts with K-12 and reaches adult audiences. Our efforts include: an annual grant program (http://www.epa.gov/education/grants/index.html), an educator training program (http://www.epa.gov/education/etap.html), and the President's Environmental Youth Awards program (http://epa.gov/envirored/). In addition, we have several web sites with information and resources developed specifically for teachers and kids of various ages (http://epa.gov/envirored/eeportals.html). We also have a web page that organizes information and educational resources by different topics (http://www.epa.gov/education/resources.html). We are currently reviewing and updating these sites. Finally, we are considering how best to use social media to educate the public about environmental issues and what they can do to help.
Jungo Road: More Collaboration with State Environmental Departments	My suggestion is that there is more collaboration with State Environmental Departments in terms of monitoring PROPOSED cross-state waste dumping and ensuring stringent permitting for complex projects that is backed by the correct resources. All of this should occur BEFORE a landfill is built. Specifically, I'd like to see the EPA getting involved with Jungo Road Landfill, Winnemucca, NV. See: www.nevadansagainstgarbage.com A local citizens group, Nevadans Against Garbage (NAG) has requested a full EIS study from the EPA on this project that would bring in 4000 tons of non-recyclable waste, 5 days per week, for 95 years to the Black Rock desert, from California. To see this letter: http://nolandfill.files.wordpress.com/2010/01/finalfinalnaga.pdf There are many unanswered questions and concerns about the project from an environmental perspective. Recology, the company behind this, is seeking an exception to Nevada statute to build their landfill closer to an active aquifer than statutes allow, increasing risk of water contamination. Often, there is standing water on the plays, right at the site of this landfill (see pictures taken 2/8/10 on our Facebook page for NAG). The waste will travel beyond it's tidy section of land via air and water. There are concerns that the Nv. Department, Environment does not have the resources to evaluate a project of this magnitude. They state their involvement is minimal. See: http://ndep.nv.gov/jungo/index.htm While the NDEP notes their involvement is minimal, the local government certainly doesn't have the resources, nor, they claim, the legal authority to evaluate the project. They say it is now up to the NDEP re permits. The company behind this mega-landfill, Recology, has made it publicly clear that it is in their best interests, economically, and in order to maintain their growth, to 'dump' in Nevada vs. California. The rules are stricter for them in California and the cost higher as compared to Nevada. Thank you for the forum, and best of luck with your planning and idea sharing approach. Get involved/informed/donate: www.nevadansagainstgarbage.com Join our e-mail list by sending your request to: landfilldata@att.net Join our Facebook Group: http://bit.ly/dwMCK Show your support even if you are under 18 or not a Winnemucca/Humboldt County Resident by signing the e-statement at: http://www.petitions.com/petition/stoplndfill	Subtitle D establishes a framework for Federal, State, and local government cooperation in controlling the management of non-hazardous solid waste. The federal role is to establish the overall regulatory direction, by providing minimum nationwide standards for protecting human health and the environment and to provide technical assistance to States for planning and developing their waste management practices. The actual planning, permitting and direct implementation of solid waste programs under Subtitle D, remains a State and local function where States devise programs to deal with site-specific conditions and needs. For municipal solid waste landfills, the Agency established minimum nationwide Criteria in 40 CFR Part 258. These Criteria include siting restrictions, operational standards, design requirements, ground-water monitoring and corrective action standards, closure and post-closure care requirements and financial assurance requirements. All states have been approved to implement the Federal municipal solid waste landfill Criteria.
Regulate the Export of eWaste	Export of a waste needs to be regulated as it is highly toxic and often poorly handled in countries where it is exported to (not to mention the inefficiency of exporting it). Manufacturers need to be required to take back and responsibly recycle any product they sell which could cause harm to the environment if not properly disposed of.	EPA recognizes the critical importance of environmentally sound recycling, and we are working hard to help encourage responsible electronics recycling both nationally and internationally.
Reprocessing Medical Equipment	The EPA should require hospitals to reprocess medical equipment. If more hospitals reprocessed medical equipment, it would not only cut down on medical waste, but also save money for health care. The EPA would not only need to work with hospitals, but also educate patients as to the safety of reprocessing. Here's an article: Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions. "Going Green in the Hospital: Recycling Medical Equipment Saves Money, Reduces Waste and Is Safe." ScienceDaily 26 February 2010.	Thank you for your comment regarding the reprocessing of medical equipment. While there are currently no EPA programs directly promoting the reprocessing of medical equipment, EPA has been working with hospitals to reduce and eliminate wastes through our Pollution Prevention (P2) program. In 1998, EPA and the American Hospital Association signed an agreement which launched the Hospitals for a Healthy Environment (H2E) partnership program. This program had the goals of eliminating mercury containing wastes from the health care system, reducing the overall volume of wastes generated and identifying hazardous substances for pollution prevention and waste reduction opportunities, especially hazardous substances. In 2006, this partnership program evolved into a fully independent non-profit organization which is now part of Practice Greenhealth (see http://www.epa.gov/p2/pubs/psh.htm for the environmental results of this partnership program). While H2E and Practice Greenhealth do promote more reprocessing of medical equipment, it is important to note that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has the primary responsibility for regulating medical devices and may have regulations that could ultimately limit the reprocessing of medical equipment.