

**EPA Library Network:  
Challenges for FY 2007 and Beyond**

**Findings and Recommendations  
of the EPA Library Network Workgroup  
November 22, 2005**

## **Workgroup Membership**

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## **Introduction and Background**

The EPA Library Network is at a critical crossroad. Although the demand for library services remains high, EPA's libraries have been receiving less funding every year for the past four or five years. There is no specific line-item budget for EPA libraries. However, the Agency's budget, especially in the Administrative Support area, has consistently experienced reductions.

In FY 2007, the funding reductions may be much deeper than experienced in the past few years because EPA's draft FY 2007 budget that was sent to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) contains a \$500,000 budget reduction for the EPA Headquarters Library and for Library Network coordination projects. Both of these are managed by the Office of Environmental Information.

The Office of Environmental Information also proposed a \$1.5 million reduction in the regional support budget for EPA's ten Regions. This budget reduction specifically targeted EPA's Regional libraries, although each Region has discretion in how they choose to spend their Regional support monies. However, as of FY 2006, the regional support budgets have been restructured such that the Regions do not have as much flexibility to move monies as they once had. For this reason, the ten EPA Regions may have limited options as to how they can absorb their share of the \$1.5 million reduction. They may simply have to reduce the funding for their libraries.

## **Purpose of EPA Library Network Workgroup**

Given this background, member libraries of the EPA Library Network agreed to study the effects of a potentially large funding reduction on the network's ability to continue providing core services to EPA employees and the general public; as well as maintaining library collections.

Representatives from many of the 27 libraries in EPA's Library Network participated in a series of conference calls, where they identified problems and proposed solutions. Results of these discussions are recorded in this report.

Because the FY 2007 proposed funding reduction could primarily affect EPA's Headquarters and Regional libraries, these were examined in detail. However, other EPA libraries within the network have been experiencing their own budget challenges. For instance, the Office of Administration and Resources Management libraries in Research Triangle Park, N.C., and Cincinnati, Ohio, anticipate having subscription budgets reduced by almost 50 percent in FY 2007.

## **Core Services Provided by EPA Regional Libraries – Current Status**

The workgroup first examined the following two questions:

1. What are the core services that our libraries provide?
2. How frequently are these core services requested by EPA employees?

Regional libraries provide a number of services to both EPA staff and to the broader public, such as students, realtors and attorneys. Regional library core services are listed below:

1. Support for EPA Scientists and Technical Staff

- Respond to quick reference and extended reference questions
- Request books and journal articles through inter-library loan process
- Provide “current awareness alerts” on new journal articles, Federal Register notices and other pertinent items
- Conduct literature searches and database searches
- Provide support for special projects, initiatives
- Provide training to EPA staff on how to conduct their own searches
- Develop and maintain library Web pages (both on EPA’s “intranet” and on the internet)

2. Support for EPA Enforcement Staff

- Conduct legal research
- Conduct business research (provides Dun & Bradstreet reports and other financial information)
- Provide scientific and technical information to support enforcement case development

3. Collection Cataloging and Maintenance

- Acquire and maintain copies of EPA reports and guidance documents
- Acquire and maintain collection of scientific and technical journals, both electronic and print
- Acquire and maintain copies of previous years’ Code of Federal Regulations (CFRs) and other legal documents

4. Support for members of the general public

- Answer quick reference and extended reference questions
- Send inter-library loan materials to other libraries, in response to ILL requests
- Conduct database searches in response to public requests
- Provide training on how to search EPA’s databases

**Regional Libraries – Additional Services**

In addition to the core services described above, Regional libraries provide a host of other services that vary depending on the Region. Some examples include:

1. Maintaining public reading rooms that are required by law, such as OCA reading rooms, Superfund dockets and FACA or FOIA reading rooms
2. Generating mailing lists of facilities that are regulated by EPA programs; these lists can be for either enforcement purposes or public outreach
3. Serving as a “public information center,” by directing incoming phone calls to the appropriate EPA personnel; and maintaining a directory of subject matter experts within the Region
4. Coordinating publication of the EPA Region’s technical reports

### **Core Services Provided by EPA Headquarters Library**

The EPA Headquarters Library provides all the core services listed above for staff of most program offices based in the Washington, D.C. area. In addition, the Office of Environmental Information provides some coordination functions for the rest of the libraries in the EPA Library Network. The most important functions are the Online Library System electronic catalogue and the EPA Desktop Library. The Online Library System allows anyone with internet access to see what is catalogued in any of EPA’s 27 libraries. The EPA Desktop Library connects staff to the commercial journals and databases acquired through a service that is funded by the Working Capital Fund.

### **How Frequently do EPA Staff Persons Use their EPA Libraries?**

Table 1 (included at the end of this report) shows the total number of core services that the ten EPA Regional libraries and EPA HQ library provided to EPA staff during FY 2005. Some highlights include:

1. 20,210 quick reference checks
2. 20,819 extended reference checks
3. 8,286 inter-library loans
4. 85,226 database and literature searches

In addition, EPA libraries provided 52,975 resources (e.g., books, journal articles) to EPA users. And there were a total of 728,362 visits to the EPA Library Web pages. These numbers clearly show that EPA Regional employees depend on their libraries for core services. For example, these services help EPA staff to:

1. Find the latest information on health risks associated with chemical substances
2. Locate the latest information on new environmental technologies
3. Prepare scientific documentation to justify EPA’s position on developing new regulations

4. Provide documentation for enforcement cases

In short, these services are extremely important, perhaps essential, in helping EPA staff perform the Agency's mission.

**Possible Effect of FY 07 Budget Reductions on EPA Library Network's Ability to Provide Core Services**

At present, the Library Network does not know how the FY 2007 proposed \$1.5 million cut to the Regional Support budget might be allocated among the ten Regions. For planning purposes, the Network assumed that the cut would be evenly divided. Table 2 (included at the end of this report) shows the FY 2005 staffing and budget levels for all ten Regional libraries; and what budget might be left if each Region took a hypothetical \$150,000 cut. A few facts become immediately apparent:

1. Beginning in FY 2007, the Regional libraries' capacity to handle the tens of thousands of core service requests from EPA users could be greatly diminished. Six of the ten Regions have indicated that they might either close their doors, or reduce their staffing, services and hours.
2. The number of Regional library contractor staff in FY 2005 was just over 21. This staffing level will be significantly reduced in FY 2007. None of the libraries currently have "supplies and subscriptions" budgets larger than \$75,000. Therefore, in order for a library to absorb a \$150,000 budget reduction, that library would have to reduce its contractor library staff. It is possible that the approximately 21 EPA Regional library contractor staff could be reduced by as much as one-third.
3. Given the large number of library service requests that the Regional libraries receive (see Table 1), it is unlikely that all of these requests will be able to be handled by the Library Network's remaining library staff in FY 2007.

**Possible Effects of the Proposed FY 2007 Budget Reduction on the EPA Headquarters Library**

The EPA Headquarters share of the proposed budget reduction is \$500,000, which equals 100% of that library's budget. This means that, without another source of funding, the EPA Headquarters Library would close. It also means that there would be no funding available to maintain the OLS electronic catalogue of EPA library holdings or the Desktop Library for access to commercial journals and databases.

Without OLS, EPA libraries will not be able to function. OLS is an electronic version of the Library Network's card catalogue. Without OLS, EPA's libraries would not be able to locate any of their individual holdings. An analogous situation would be if, for instance, a person were to visit a municipal library and ask for the location of a particular book. Without an electronic catalogue, the most that a librarian would be able to say would be something like, "It's supposed to be somewhere on the third

floor.” But that librarian would not be able to direct the inquirer to the exact shelf where the book is located; or tell the inquirer whether the book had already been checked out.

### **Options for Continuing to Provide Core Library Services to EPA staff**

The options for each EPA Region or Headquarters office depend on whether that office chooses to close its physical library or keep it open. In either case, the goal of the EPA Library Network is to ensure that all EPA staff persons have access to core library services.

### **Regions that Choose to Close their Libraries**

Regions that close their physical libraries have two basic options:

1. They can discontinue support of all library core services, thereby eliminating all library resources for their Regional staff.
  - This is not a good option for any EPA Regional office. The numbers in Table 1 clearly show that EPA’s professional staff rely on library core services to accomplish their work. Failing to provide access to library core services could adversely affect Regional staff persons’ ability to function. Therefore, the workgroup did not consider this option any further.
2. They can purchase core services from another library. This option could work as follows:
  - Funds would be transferred from the “buyer” EPA office to the “seller” library in a lump sum, through a commitment notice, at the beginning of the fiscal year.
  - The “seller” library would charge against the lump sum that it receives. Charges could be accrued as follows:
    - The number of hours a library staff person takes to complete a task, charged at that person’s hourly rate.
    - The charge for using any database or resource that has a “per usage” fee.
  - In addition to the “per use” charges stated above, EPA libraries that remain open may choose to pass on other costs to their customers. For instance:
    - Libraries remaining open may have to assume the costs to maintain the OLS catalogue. If this happens, these libraries could off-set the OLS maintenance costs by adding a “per transaction fee” to any request made by the buyer.
    - These libraries may also add a “per transaction fee” to help cover the costs of databases that they have to subscribe to (a “RegsKnowledge” subscription, for instance).
    - Other administrative fees.

## **Regions that Keep their Libraries Open**

Regions that keep their libraries open have three options:

1. They can close their physical libraries and disperse their physical collections, but retain library contractor staff to provide core services for their Regional staff. Implementing this option would include the following costs:
  - Salary for the librarian who is retained
  - Subscription to databases that the librarian would use to conduct searches
  - Closure of the physical library, and dispersal of the collection (described in detail later in the report)
2. They can retain both library staff and their physical collection; and provide core services for their Regional staff only (and perhaps non-EPA users within their region). For each Region, implementing this option would require the following costs:
  - Salary for library staff
  - Subscriptions to databases needed to conduct searches; and
  - Possibly – paying a share of the cost to maintain the OLS catalogue
3. They can maintain their library, and sell services to EPA offices that no longer have a library.
  - Costs to implement this option would be similar to those identified in Option 2. There may be some additional costs for subscriptions to databases as the library's "service area" expands. However, libraries implementing this option could receive additional funding from other regions.

In addition to the three options above, EPA Region 4 has been exploring other possibilities, including developing partnerships with educational institutions and other Federal agencies that have a similar mission. This unique arrangement may be mutually beneficial to the agencies involved, who could share the costs to provide services.

## **EPA Libraries that Could Possibly Sell Library Core Services**

As of 11/21/2005, four Regional Libraries (3, 5, 8, and 10) have expressed interest in selling services. In addition, the large laboratory libraries at RTP and Cincinnati could supply services on a cost-reimbursable basis.

Libraries may sell services on a broad level that would include general reference and inter-library loan. Or they could sell services that require special expertise. For instance, Region 3 has considerable expertise in conducting research on companies. There has been some discussion of two or three of these libraries partnering to sell services, in order to share operating costs.

The final structure of the EPA Library Network will become more apparent in the next few months, as individual regions make their decisions to close their libraries, or keep them open.

### **Dispersal of EPA Library Collections**

The workgroup spent considerable time discussing the potential impact of FY 2007 library closures on the accessibility of the EPA library collections.

EPA libraries have traditionally been the repositories of EPA reports and guidance documents, many of which are used by both EPA and non-EPA customers. The OLS catalogue shows that the Agency has approximately 350,000 holdings, consisting of reports, books, technical journals, audiotapes and videotapes. Many EPA libraries (including Regional and lab libraries) have unique holdings which are not found anywhere else in the network.

Responsible dispersal of an EPA library's collection is an essential part of any library closure. "Responsible dispersal" means that the collection, especially those unique holdings, must remain accessible to both EPA and non-EPA users on an ongoing basis. In other words, it is not a viable option to simply lock the doors of a library, and leave the collection in the space where nobody has access to it.

Closure of the EPA Headquarters library, and several Regional libraries, presents a huge and costly challenge for the Agency to responsibly disperse its collection by September 30, 2006. EPA Regions that choose to close their libraries will be faced with the costs for someone to:

1. Go through the collection and weed out multiple copies of items;
2. Place the items in boxes; catalogue and label each box; and
3. Revise OLS to show the new locations of each item.

Specific costs will vary for each Region, depending on the size of the collection. The network can draw on the experience of the Edison, NJ lab library closure, to get some idea of the costs associated with collection dispersal.

For even the relatively small Edison, NJ collection, it would take one full-time librarian more than a year to disperse the collection. And unfortunately, Regional libraries that choose to close have less than a year to disperse their collections. Everything should be completed by September 30, 2006.

It would be possible to bring in a "SWAT Team" of contractor staff to quickly disperse the EPA library collections. For example, a contractor team of 4 library staff would be able to successfully disperse the Edison lab library collection in 3 – 6 months. A four-person team would cost an estimated \$150 - \$200 per hour; or \$24,000 - \$32,000 per month.

These are estimated costs are for the Edison, NJ lab library collection, which is relatively small compared to other EPA libraries. The costs for a larger EPA library collection will be higher. The larger the collection held by a library, the greater the costs for its responsible dispersal.

### **Workgroup Recommendations**

1. The “no library” option is the least viable option any EPA Region. Table 1 clearly shows that many EPA regional staff rely on the core services that the EPA library network provides. Therefore, any Region that closes its library should plan to set aside funds to pay another EPA library in the network to provide these services.
2. Some EPA libraries that remain open in FY 2007 should offer to provide core library services, for an agreed-upon fee, to those EPA Regions and Headquarters offices that no longer have their own libraries.
3. If the EPA Headquarters library, and several Regional libraries, all close by September 30, 2006, the Agency will be faced with a huge challenge to responsibly disperse its collections. The Agency should do whatever it takes to ensure that these collections will continue to be available to both EPA and non-EPA users on an ongoing basis. This might require an investment of funds to hire contractors that can responsibly pack, label, ship and re-catalogue the holdings for each library that closes.
4. The Office of Environmental Information should fund the continued maintenance of the library network’s OLS catalogue for FY 2007, and perhaps for a few years after that. This would give the Library Network sufficient time to figure out how to absorb the costs to maintain this electronic catalogue.

