



June 29, 2006

The Honorable Conrad Burns, Chair
Appropriations Committee, Interior and Related Agencies Subcommittee
United States Senate

The Honorable Byron Dorgan, Ranking Member
Appropriations Committee, Interior and Related Agencies Subcommittee
United States Senate

Honorable Members of Congress:

We, the undersigned, are Presidents of 16 Local Unions representing at least 10,000 EPA scientists, engineers, environmental protection specialists and support staff. We are writing to protest the proposed \$2 million budget reduction to the EPA operations and administration budget, which EPA management intends to use to close as many of our technical libraries as possible.

Many of us rely heavily on our technical libraries to perform our jobs in an effective manner. Our library staff provides us with the latest research on cutting-edge homeland security and public health issues. The ability of EPA to respond to emergencies will be reduced because important reference materials may be unavailable or take significant time to receive from storage or another library. In addition, the libraries conduct business searches for enforcement officers and provide EPA with a host of other resources that cannot be found with a standard internet search.

In short, our technical library staff provide vital support services that allow EPA scientists to spend more time conducting inspections, writing public health and environmental policies, and implementing the Agency's regulations. **For these reasons, we urge Congress to re-instate the \$2 million budget reduction, and mandate that EPA management use these funds to keep open our existing technical libraries.**

In addition to vital library services for EPA employees, we are very concerned that the public will no longer have access to many of our Agency's past reports and technical documents. Already, EPA library services have been significantly reduced, or are no longer available to the public in EPA Regions 1, 2, 5, and 6, which service 19 states.

Senior EPA managers are touting the message that the \$2 million budget reduction, and subsequent library closures, will promote increased "efficiencies," with virtually all EPA reports

being available in an electronic format. These “savings” are illusory. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Here are some sobering facts regarding our impending library closures:

- The National Environmental Publications Information System, EPA’s repository of electronic documents, currently holds about 13,000 documents. But the Agency has a total of about 80,000 documents that should be retained; most of these are not yet available in any electronic format. Our management has not addressed the issue of how much it will cost to digitize these thousands of reports, where the money will come from, or how long it will take to complete the task.
- Some of EPA’s library collections are being dispersed without establishing any standard procedures or criteria to ensure that important documents are not lost. For instance, the EPA Region 5 library in Chicago will close on 9/30/06, and is already offering its collections to other libraries.
- EPA’s Office of Environmental Information (OEI), in a cost-benefit analysis completed in 2004 (“Business Case for Information Services: EPA’s Regional Libraries and Centers,” EPA-260-R-04-001, January 2004), estimated that EPA’s library network saved Agency professional staff time of more than 214,000 hours – a cost savings of approximately \$7.5 million. The benefit to cost ratio was conservatively estimated at 4.4-to-1.
- Based on our assessment of EPA’s long-range library plan, we have concluded that our Agency intends to stop providing any EPA library services to the public. Our management has indicated that the inquiring public will get their information either from EPA hotlines or program staff, or from our website. They also assert that all EPA documents will be available “on-line,” for easy retrieval. But this proposed approach does not consider, for instance, how university, school, and municipal libraries will borrow paper copies of EPA’s documents through the inter-library loan process. The approach would also deprive working-class people of a user-friendly, well-staffed EPA library system that can provide them with environmental and public health information; and we consider this to be an “environmental justice” issue.

We tried to resolve this issue internally by sending a Union “Demand to Bargain” to EPA management. Senior Agency management rebuffed us, saying that the topic was “premature” to negotiate because no formal FY 2007 library plan has yet been adopted. But the dismantling of EPA libraries is already underway, without a coherent plan in place.

The proposed \$2 million budget cut for EPA libraries was initiated by EPA management, and approved by the Office of Management and Budget and the President, before being sent to Congress. We believe that this budget cut is just one of many Bush Administration initiatives to reduce the effectiveness of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and to continue to demoralize its employees.

We also believe that the sudden, draconian manner in which the EPA libraries are being closed, with little regard to protection of its unique collection of past technical reports and documents, is one more example of the Bush Administration’s efforts to suppress information on environmental and public health-related topics while cloaking these actions under the guise of “fiscal responsibility.”

In summary, both EPA scientists and technical staff, and the citizens of the United States will experience a loss if this \$2 million reduction is included in the final FY 2007 budget. We urge you to restore this funding to EPA's FY 2007 operational and administrative budget, and to include explicit instructions that the funding be used to continue to support EPA's existing Regional libraries.

Very sincerely yours,

/s/
Dwight A. Welch, President,
NTEU Chapter 280, Washington, DC

/s/
Steve Shapiro, President
AFGE Local 3331, Washington, DC

/s/
Dave Christenson, President
AFGE Local 3607, Denver

/s/
Larry Penley, President
NTEU Chapter 279, Cincinnati

/s/
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Charles Orzechoskie, President
AFGE Council 238

CC:

Senator Ted Stevens

Senator Thad Cochran

Senator Pete Domenici

Senator Robert Bennett

Senator Judd Gregg

Senator Larry Craig

Senator Wayne Allard

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Senator Patrick Leahy

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