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Research Documents

Primary Sources

Richard Nixon on the Establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency

July 9, 1970

To the Congress of the United States:

As concern with the condition of our physical environment has intensified, it has become increasingly clear that we need to know more about the total environment-land, water and air. It also has become increasingly clear that only by reorganizing our Federal efforts can we develop that knowledge, and effectively ensure the protection, development and enhancement of the total environment itself.

The Government's environmentally related activities have grown up piecemeal over the years. The time has come to organize them rationally and systematically. As a major step in this direction, I am transmitting today two reorganization plans: one to establish an Environmental Protection Agency, and one to establish, within the Department of Commerce, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

(EPA)

Our national government today is not structured to make a coordinated attack on the pollutants which debase the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the land that grows our food. Indeed, the present governmental structure for dealing with environmental pollution often defies effective and concerted action.

Despite its complexity, for pollution control purposes the environment must be perceived as a single, interrelated system. Present assignments of departmental responsibilities do not reflect this interrelatedness.

Many agency missions, for example, are designed primarily along media lines--air, water, and land. Yet the sources of air, water, and land pollution are interrelated and often interchangeable. A single source may pollute the air with smoke and chemicals, the land with solid wastes, and a river or lake with chemical and other wastes. Control of the air pollution may produce more solid wastes, which then pollute the land or water. Control of the water-polluting effluent may convert it into solid wastes, which must be disposed of on land.

Similarly, some pollutants---chemicals, radiation, pesticides--appear in all media. Successful control of them at present requires the coordinated efforts of a variety of separate agencies and departments. The results are not always successful.

A far more effective approach to pollution control would:

--Identify pollutants.

- Trace them through the entire ecological chain, observing and recording changes in form as they occur.
- Determine the total exposure of man and his environment.
- Examine interactions among forms of pollution.
- Identify where in the ecological chain interdiction would be most appropriate.

In organizational terms, this requires pulling together into one agency a variety of research, monitoring, standard-setting and enforcement activities now scattered through several departments and agencies. It also requires that the new agency include sufficient support elements--in research and in aids to State and local anti-pollution programs, for example--to give it the needed strength and potential for carrying out its mission. The new agency would also, of course, draw upon the results of research conducted by other agencies.

COMPONENTS OF THE EPA

Under the terms of Reorganization Plan No. 3, the following would be moved to the new Environmental Protection Agency:

- The functions carried out by the Federal Water Quality Administration (from the Department of the Interior).
- Functions with respect to pesticides studies now vested in the Department of the Interior.
- The functions carried out by the National Air Pollution Control Administration (from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare).
- The functions carried out by the Bureau of Solid Waste Management and the Bureau of Water Hygiene, and portions of the reactions carried out by the Bureau of Radiological Health of the Environmental Control Administration (from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare).
- Certain functions with respect to pesticides carried out by the Food and Drug Administration (from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare).
- Authority to perform studies relating to ecological systems now vested in the Council on Environmental Quality.
- Certain functions respecting radiation criteria and standards now vested in the Atomic Energy Commission and the Federal Radiation Council.
- Functions respecting pesticides registration and related activities now carried out by the Agricultural Research Service (from the Department of Agriculture).

With its broad mandate, EPA would also develop competence in areas of environmental protection that have not previously been given enough attention, such, for example, as the problem of noise, and it would provide an organization to which new programs in these areas could be added.

In brief, these are the principal functions to be transferred:

Federal Water Quality Administration. Charged with the control of pollutants which impair water quality, it is broadly concerned with the impact of degraded water quality. It performs a

wide variety of functions, including research, standard-setting and enforcement, and provides construction grants and technical assistance.

Certain pesticides research authority from the Department of the Interior. Authority for research on the effects of pesticides on fish and wildlife would be provided to the EPA through transfer of the specialized research authority of the pesticides act enacted in 1958. Interior would retain its responsibility to do research on all factors affecting fish and wildlife. Under this provision, only one laboratory would be transferred to the EPA--the Gulf Breeze Biological Laboratory of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. The EPA would work closely with the fish and wildlife laboratories remaining with the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

National Air Pollution Control Administration. As the principal Federal agency concerned with air pollution, it conducts research on the effects of air pollution, operates a monitoring network, and promulgates criteria which serve as the basis for setting air quality standards. Its regulatory functions are similar to those of the Federal Water Quality Administration. NAPCA is responsible for administering the Clean Air Act, which involves designating air quality regions, approving State standards, and providing financial and technical assistance to State Control agencies to enable them to comply with the Act's provisions. It also sets and enforces Federal automotive emission standards.

Elements of the Environmental Control Administration. ECA is the focal point within HEW for evaluation and control of a broad range of environmental health problems, including water quality, solid wastes, and radiation. Programs in the ECA involve research, development of criteria and standards, and the administration of planning and demonstration grants. From the ECA, the activities of the Bureaus of Water Hygiene and Solid Waste Management and portions of the activities of the Bureau of Radiological Health would be transferred. Other functions of the ECA including those related to the regulation of radiation from consumer products and occupational safety and health would remain in HEW.

Pesticides research and standard-setting programs of the Food and Drug Administration. FDA's pesticides program consists of setting and enforcing standards which limit pesticide residues in food. EPA would have the authority to set pesticide standards and to monitor compliance with them, as well as to conduct related research. However, as an integral part of its food protection activities, FDA would retain its authority to remove from the market food with excess pesticide residues.

General ecological research from the Council on Environmental Quality. This authority to perform studies and research relating to ecological systems would be in addition to EPA's other specific research authorities, and it would help EPA to measure the impact of pollutants. The Council on Environmental Quality would retain its authority to conduct studies and research relating to environmental quality.

Environmental radiation standards programs. The Atomic Energy Commission is now responsible for establishing environmental radiation standards and emission limits for radioactivity. Those standards have been based largely on broad guidelines recommended by the Federal Radiation Council. The Atomic Energy Commission's authority to set standards for the

protection of the general environment from radioactive material would be transferred to the Environmental Protection Agency. The functions of the Federal Radiation Council would also be transferred. AEC would retain responsibility for the implementation and enforcement of radiation standards through its licensing authority.

Pesticides registration program of the Agricultural Research Service. The Department of Agriculture is currently responsible for several distinct functions related to pesticides use. It conducts research on the efficacy of various pesticides as related to other pest control methods and on the effects of pesticides on nontarget plants, livestock, and poultry. It registers pesticides, monitors their persistence and carries out an educational program on pesticide use through the extension service. It conducts extensive pest control programs which utilize pesticides.

By transferring the Department of Agriculture's pesticides registration and monitoring function to the EPA and merging it with the pesticides programs being transferred from HEW and Interior, the new agency would be given a broad capability for control over the introduction of pesticides into the environment.

The Department of Agriculture would continue to conduct research on the effectiveness of pesticides. The Department would furnish this information to the EPA, which would have the responsibility for actually licensing pesticides for use after considering environmental and health effects. Thus the new agency would be able to make use of the expertise of the Department.

ADVANTAGES OF REORGANIZATION

This reorganization would permit response to environmental problems in a manner beyond the previous capability of our pollution control programs. The EPA would have the capacity to do research on important pollutants irrespective of the media in which they appear, and on the impact of these pollutants on the total environment. Both by itself and together with other agencies, the EPA would monitor the condition of the environment-biological as well as physical. With these data, the EPA would be able to establish quantitative "environmental baselines" critical if we are to measure adequately the success or failure of our pollution abatement efforts.

As no disjointed array of separate programs can, the EPA would be able--in concert with the States--to set and enforce standards for air and water quality and for individual pollutants. This consolidation of pollution control authorities would help assure that we do not create new environmental problems in the process of controlling existing ones. Industries seeking to minimize the adverse impact of their activities on the environment would be assured of consistent standards covering the full range of their waste disposal problems. As the States develop and expand their own pollution control programs, they would be able to look to one agency to support their efforts with financial and technical assistance and training.

In proposing that the Environmental Protection Agency be set up as a separate new agency, I am making an exception to one of my own principles: that, as a matter of effective and orderly administration, additional new independent agencies normally should not be created. In this case,

however, the arguments against placing environmental protection activities under the jurisdiction of one or another of the existing departments and agencies are compelling.

In the first place, almost every part of government is concerned with the environment in some way, and affects it in some way. Yet each department also has its own primary mission--such as resource development, transportation, health, defense, urban growth or agriculture--which necessarily affects its own view of environmental questions.

In the second place, if the critical standard-setting functions were centralized within any one existing department, it would require that department constantly to make decisions affecting other departments--in which, whether fairly or unfairly, its own objectivity as an impartial arbiter could be called into question.

Because environmental protection cuts across so many jurisdictions, and because arresting environmental deterioration is of great importance to the quality of life in our country and the world, I believe that in this case a strong, independent agency is needed. That agency would, of course, work closely with and draw upon the expertise and assistance of other agencies having experience in the environmental area.

ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF EPA

The principal roles and functions of the EPA would include:

- The establishment and enforcement of environmental protection standards consistent with national environmental goals.
- The conduct of research on the adverse effects of pollution and on methods and equipment for controlling it, the gathering of information on pollution, and the use of this information in strengthening environmental protection programs and recommending policy changes.
- Assisting others, through grants, technical assistance and other means in arresting pollution of the environment.
- Assisting the Council on Environmental Quality in developing and recommending to the President new policies for the protection of the environment.

One natural question concerns the relationship between the EPA and the Council on Environmental Quality, recently established by Act of Congress.

It is my intention and expectation that the two will work in close harmony, reinforcing each other's mission. Essentially, the Council is a top-level advisory group (which might be compared with the Council of Economic Advisers), while the EPA would be an operating, "line" organization. The Council will continue to be a part of the Executive Office of the President and will perform its overall coordinating and advisory roles with respect to all Federal programs related to environmental quality.

The Council, then, is concerned with all aspects of environmental quality--wildlife preservation, parklands, land use, and population growth, as well as pollution. The EPA would be charged with protecting the environment by abating pollution. In short, the Council focuses on what our broad policies in the environmental field should be; the EPA would focus on setting and

enforcing pollution control standards. The two are not competing, but complementary--and taken together, they should give us, for the first time, the means to mount an effectively coordinated campaign against environmental degradation in all of its many forms

Source: Richard Nixon: "Special Message to the Congress About Reorganization Plans To Establish the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration," July 9, 1970. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2575>.