

FY 2007 budget endangers EPA libraries

In recent weeks, the possible closure of several libraries in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has gained much attention from the library community and the press at large. The \$2 million budget cut that could bring about these closures (initially proposed by EPA and included in President Bush's budget proposals for fiscal year [FY] 2007) would reduce the 35-year-old EPA Library Network's budget by 80 percent and force closure of several regional libraries. EPA administrators have argued that these closings will not affect access to the important environmental and scientific collections and data sets, since online functions will meet the needs of the EPA staff, researchers, and the public.

However, many scientists, EPA staff, and librarians continue to dispute this contention. ALA and other critics have argued that the EPA library online services are not fully in place and are not adequate to meet the current as well as future demands of users. Further, few advances were made in the online resources before the announcement about the library closings was made.

It has been reported that the President's Budget for FY 2008 could make even deeper cutbacks to the entire EPA budget in what some suggest is a move to close down the entire agency. Until the American public—and especially the library, research, and science communities—puts political pressure on Congress to preserve EPA and its important functions as a whole, the likelihood of reopening the EPA libraries and stabilizing the modest library services still available is extremely low. The library closings are a symptom of the even larger threat to the entire agency.

As of the writing of this article, the following libraries have been affected. Closed: Region 5, which served Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin; Region 6, which

served Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas; Region 7, which served Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska.

Closed to the public with reduced hours to EPA staff: Region 2, which served New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands; and the Office of Prevention, Pollution and Toxic Substances (OPPTS) Library.

Reduced access to EPA staff and the public: Region 1, which serves Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont; Region 9, which serves Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada, the Pacific Islands, and Tribal Nations; Region 10, which serves Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Native Tribes; and headquarters.

At this time, the best option appears to be of the grassroots variety. Urge members of Congress to seek language on FY 2007 appropriations, currently being reviewed in the lame-duck session, that would a) prohibit the EPA from closing any more EPA libraries and b) restore funding for those libraries that EPA closed. Senators can be asked to add their names to the Friday, November 3 letter sent by 18 Senators to Senate Appropriators asking that EPA be directed to maintain physical access to its libraries, while the public is given an opportunity to comment on planned library closures. //

Fact!

The term *lame-duck session* refers to the period of time between an election and the end of a Congressional session.

In the United States, for a bill to become a law it must be passed by both Chambers of Congress and signed by the President. If any of these three steps aren't completed before a legislative session ends, a bill dies, and the new Congress starts from scratch in January. The current lame-duck session—essentially, the end of the second session of the 109th Congress—will most likely end in mid-December. The 110th Congress will convene in the early days of January.

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