Environmental Impact Statement Encyclopedia Article

Environmental Impact Statement

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Environmental Impact Statement

The U.S. National Environmental Policy Act of 1970 (NEPA) requires that all federal agencies prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prior to making decisions that could have a significant impact on the environment. An EIS includes a description of the proposed action; alternatives to the action, including the "null" (no action) alternative; a description of the environmental context; expected impacts and irreversible use of resources; and ways to potentially lessen such impact. Impacts are broadly defined to include discussion of natural systems, human health, and the man-made environment. A draft EIS is then circulated to government agencies, in some cases Native-American tribes, and other interested parties for comment. The final EIS must include responses to any substantive comments received on the draft.

For the sake of efficiency and improved public participation, regulatory agencies frequently combine pollution-release permit review with the EIS process. Impact mitigation that is within the scope of the regulation, such as water discharges, can be required as an enforceable condition of the permit. From the outset of NEPA, courts have held that citizens and environmental groups have "standing" to challenge the adequacy of an EIS. This potential for protracted litigation provides the incentive for involving interest groups throughout the decision process. Many states and countries have adopted EIS requirements similar to those of NEPA.

Internet Resource

U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). NEPA Web site. Available from http://tis.eh.doe.gov/nepa.