



Environmental Protection Agency: Protecting human health and the Environment

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The mission of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is to protect human health and the environment.

EPA's purpose is to ensure that:

- All Americans are protected from significant risks to human health and the environment where they live, learn and work;
- National efforts to reduce environmental risk are based on the best available scientific information;
- Federal laws protecting human health and the environment are enforced fairly and effectively;
- Environmental protection is an integral consideration in U.S. policies concerning natural resources, human health, economic growth, energy, transportation, agriculture, industry, and international trade, and these factors are similarly considered in establishing environmental policy;
- All parts of society—communities, individuals, businesses, and state, local and tribal governments—have access to accurate information sufficient to effectively participate in managing human health and environmental risks;
- Environmental protection contributes to making our communities and ecosystems diverse, sustainable and economically productive; and
- The United States plays a leadership role in working with other nations to protect the global environment.

requires federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision making processes by considering the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and reasonable alternatives to those actions.

To meet NEPA requirements, federal agencies prepare a detailed statement known as an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). EPA reviews and comments on EIS's prepared by other federal agencies, maintains a national filing system for all EIS's, and assures that its own actions comply with NEPA.

Environmental Assessments (EA) are conducted when the federal action does not significantly impact the environment. EPA reviews EA's on a case-by-case basis.

In addition, EPA oversees states in their implementation of the Clean Water Act. Each surface water body is designated by its benefits, such as: fishing, recreation, public water supply, agriculture, industrial use or navigation. Each benefit has corresponding criteria to ensure that the water is biologically healthy and doesn't have excessive levels of toxins or other pollutants.

For example, to protect fisheries, both Georgia and South Carolina require an average of 5 milligrams per liter (mg/L) of dissolved oxygen in their freshwaters – and 6 mg/L in trout streams.

EPA continually conducts and provides states the latest water quality research. Additionally, the agency assists states in permitting wastewater discharges, managing storm water runoff and provides financing for municipal treatment facilities.

**—Provided by Jamie Higgins and Stephen Maurano,
Environmental Protection Agency.**

As a part of that mission, Congress, in 1970, passed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which