
Regulatory Oversight and Public Involvement at Sandia National Laboratories, USA

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U.S. Environmental Protection Laws

- **U.S. laws are enacted by U.S. Congress**
 - Each law addresses one or more specific topics
 - Response to public concern (health and safety, environmental issues)
 - Response to ongoing or expected future events or risks (environmental contamination, actual or potential health effects)
- **Establish overall requirement for protection of people and the environment**
- **Usually do not contain detailed requirements**



U.S. Environmental Protection Regulations

- **Developed by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)**
 - Focus is protecting people from significant risks to human health and the environment
 - Cost of following regulations may or may not be considered when developing them
 - There are fines and penalties for not following the regulations



U.S. Environmental Protection Regulations (continued)

- **Content of regulations**

- Set up process to be followed to comply with each law
- Set up national process for controlling future environmental emissions and contamination
- May include national standards and pollutant limits
- May include provisions for individual states and tribes to develop their own regulations that meet the national standards

- **Guidance documents**

- Explain regulations or provide information



Individual States and Tribes

- **Environmental protection laws**
 - Cannot contradict federal laws
 - Can be more stringent
- **Regulations**
 - Developed by state environmental protection agency
 - Cannot contradict federal laws
 - Can be more stringent
 - Take the place of federal regulations after U.S. EPA approval
 - Enforced by state agency



U.S. EPA Mission

- **Protect human health and the environment**
 - Protect people from significant risks to human health and the environment at home, school, and work
 - Use the best available scientific information to develop efforts to reduce risks
 - Enforce laws and regulations fairly
 - Consider environmental protection in U.S. policies for natural resources, human health, economic growth, energy, transportation, agriculture, industry, and trade
 - Consider all these factors in environmental policies



U.S. EPA Mission, continued

- Make sure all parts of American society have access to accurate information to participate in managing human health and environmental risks
- Environmental protection helps make communities and the environment sustainable and economically productive



U.S. EPA Activities

- **Develop and enforce regulations**
 - Develop policies and guidance
- **Provide funding for projects**
 - Scientific studies and community education
 - Partnerships
- **Study environmental issues**
 - Perform research at EPA laboratories and review other research
- **Provide information**
 - Information about research and standards
 - Materials for students and teachers



Other Agencies

FEDERAL

- **U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Environmental Management**
 - Responsible for management of radioactive materials
 - Responsible for nuclear waste and radioactive waste from DOE facilities

STATE

- **New Mexico Environment Department Hazardous Waste Bureau**
 - Issues and enforces regulations
 - Issues permits and approves cleanups



Cleanups

- **Several regulations**
 - Abandoned wastes and severe environmental contamination with bankrupt owner or no owner
 - Environmental contamination at sites with hazardous wastes and owners
 - Environmental contamination at old properties known as “brownfields”
- **Public involvement in each one**



Public Involvement

- **Regulations and guidance**

- Proposed regulations and changes published for comments
- Some proposed guidance documents published for comments
- Announcements on EPA or state agency website
- Agency must consider and answer comments

- **Permits**

- Meeting before submitting permit application
- Proposed permit and major permit changes published for comments
- Agency must consider and answer comments



Public Involvement, continued

- **Plans**

- Cleanup work plans and changes published for comments before approval
- Long-term monitoring and care plans and changes published for comments before approval
- Agency must consider and answer comments

- **Decisions**

- Cleanup completion published for comments before approval
- Other major proposed decisions published for comments
- Agency must consider and answer comments



Public Involvement, continued

- **Most significant activities**

- Activities are usually defined in regulations
- Anyone can request a formal public hearing
- Comments and testimony from agency, industrial facility, and concerned people
- Hearing official makes recommendation to environmental agency
- Agency must consider recommendation



Public Involvement at SNL

- **Proposed permit for hazardous waste management and completion of cleanups**
 - People and Sandia have submitted comments to NMED
 - People and Sandia have requested NMED hold a public hearing
- **Proposed monitoring plans**
 - People have submitted comments to NMED



Public Involvement at SNL, continued

- **Other laws**

- Availability of government information upon request
- People have requested information about SNL
- Information about past activities and environmental contamination



U.S. EPA Environmental Justice

- **Focus on people affected by activity**
 - People who live near contamination sources and may be exposed to more than one contamination source
 - People who may not be aware of risks to human health or the environment from nearby contamination
 - People who may not have internet access
- **Activities**
 - Provide more useful information about risks to people and community groups
 - Ask people and community groups which information is most useful and how best to provide it