

# The Washington Post

May 15, 2006 Monday  
Final Edition

## Budget Cut Would Shutter EPA Libraries

BYLINE: Christopher Lee, Washington Post Staff Writer

SECTION: A Section; A15

LENGTH: 651 words

Proposed budget cuts could cripple a nationwide system of Environmental Protection Agency libraries that government researchers and others depend on for hard-to-find technical information, library advocates say.

The \$2 million cut sought by the White House would reduce the 35-year-old EPA Library Network's budget by 80 percent and force many of its 10 regional libraries to close, according to the advocates and internal agency documents.

That, in turn, would dramatically reduce access to certain EPA reports, guidance and technical documents that are used by the agency's scientific and enforcement staff as well as private businesses and citizens, they say.

"They are moving ahead very quickly on very substantive cuts to their library program," said Patrice McDermott, deputy director of the American Library Association's Office of Government Relations. "They really don't have a good plan for continuing to provide access for the public, and even their own researchers and scientists, to the information."

EPA spokeswoman Jennifer Wood said it was "premature" to talk of mass closings among the regional libraries, although the one in Chicago already is shutting down. Wood said that 15 other EPA libraries, many of them attached to federal laboratories, will not be affected by the budget cuts.

She said the agency plans to save money and operate more efficiently by making EPA materials in the regional libraries available electronically. Many documents that exist only on paper will continue to be available through interlibrary loans, Wood said.

"EPA's commitment remains unchanged in providing EPA's staff with access to environmental information to support sound environmental decisions. [The agency] encourages the public to use our information resources and will continue to provide public access," Wood said.

McDermott said digitizing the EPA library holdings is "a great idea" -- but it remains little more than that. "You can't just stop providing access to your print on the chance that some day five, six, seven years down the road you are going to have it digital," she said.

The libraries provide documentation for enforcement cases and help EPA staff track new environmental technologies and the health risks associated with dangerous chemicals. They also are repositories of scientific information that is used to back up the agency's position on new regulations and environmental reports and data that are tapped by everyone from developers to airports, to state and local officials. Their collections include hard-to-find copies of documents on federal Superfund hazardous waste sites, water-quality data and the health of regional ecosystems.

Betty Lou Hicks, manager of library services for Hanson Professional Services, an engineering consulting firm in Springfield, Ill., said her company draws on documents from the libraries to conduct wetland studies, environmental assessments and geotechnical surveys. The firm's typical clients might include an airport looking to build a new runway, she said.

"It's very important for us to be able to get our hands on these documents," Hicks said, "and yet with these libraries closing down, it means that the documents aren't going to be readily available. So that means we're going to have to do a lot more searching, and that means time -- and, of course, time is money to us."

The public has a lot at stake in the future of these libraries, said Jeff Ruch, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, a nonprofit advocacy group that obtained internal EPA documents on the proposed cuts.

"We view this as another example of the Bush administration marginalizing EPA research so that the agency scientists and other specialists can't do their jobs," Ruch said. "And then in the absence of information, plans by industries and others that have environmental implications go forward."



## ***EPA Budget Cuts Trouble Environment Groups***

**Environmental Protection Agency's Budget Cuts Trouble Environmental Groups**

**By JOHN HEILPRIN**

**The Associated Press**

**WASHINGTON - Feb 10, 2006 (AP)**— Grants to state and local governments for land and water conservation would be cut 40 percent, and money for the Environmental Protection Agency's network of libraries for scientists would be slashed severely under President Bush's proposed budget.

By contrast, Bush next year would spend \$322 million for "cooperative conservation" up from \$312 million the Congress approved last year to encourage more private landowners to protect endangered species, conserve wildlife habitats and do other nature work traditionally done by government.

Other proposed increases are \$50 million more for cleaner-burning diesel engines and \$5 million more for drinking water improvements.

Cuts and proposals to sell some of the government's vast land holdings have upset environmentalists.

Early in his presidency, Bush called for restoring the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund to the full \$900 million authorized by Congress. Last year, it was approved at \$142 million. For 2007, he wants just \$85 million in grants for creating and preserving non-federal parks, forest land and wildlife refuges, a 40 percent cut.

"This is the most troubling budget we've seen from this White House," said Heather Taylor, deputy legislative director for Natural Resources Defense Council.

The proposal sent to Congress this week would trim EPA's budget by nearly 5 percent, down to \$7.2 billion, and the Interior Department's budget by 2.4 percent, to \$9.1 billion.

Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., said it shows the environment isn't a Bush administration priority. "We cannot allow this dangerous trend to continue," said Jeffords, a senior member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

Interior Secretary Gale Norton and EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson said their budgets represent, within the context of reducing the federal deficit, a responsible allocation of resources that will still lead to environmental improvements.

One potential hole in the Interior budget is \$312 million for an Office of Surface Mining program to reclaim abandoned mines. The money comes from coal mining fees set to expire in June. The Bush administration is asking Congress to reauthorize the fees.

"Nobody wants to see the program come to a halt," Norton said.

The budget also would cut \$89 million from the National Park Service's nearly \$2.6 billion budget.

Environmentalists contend a bigger danger is the administration's plan to raise \$250 million over five years by selling 125,000 acres of the Bureau of Land Management's 261 million acres.

The lands are typically part of a "checkerboard" pattern of small parcels surrounded by suburban or urban areas, Interior officials say, and have been identified as holding little natural, historic, cultural or energy value.

The administration anticipates selling them for \$2,000 an acre. The Forest Service plans to sell 170,000-200,000 acres in 41 states, according to The Wilderness Society.

Another proposal affects EPA's electronic catalog that keeps track of tens of thousands of agency documents and research studies, according to EPA internal memos. The agency would cut four-fifths of its library budget from \$2.5 million to \$500,000. It pays for a network of dozens of libraries and reading rooms nationally.

"How are EPA scientists supposed to engage in cutting edge research when they cannot find what the agency has already done?" said Jeff Ruch, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, which obtained the EPA memos.

EPA spokeswoman Eryn Witcher said materials will still be available.

"EPA is working to modernize our antiquated system by streamlining our physical collections and making them available online to provide more information to a wider group of people, including scientists," she said.

Low-interest loans to states for treating wastewater, cutting other water pollution and managing watersheds would be cut by 22 percent, to \$688 million.

Bush has requested \$184 million for EPA's homeland security programs including monitoring water supplies against terrorists and decontaminating buildings after chemical or biological attacks and more than \$100 million for its energy-related programs.

# Chattanooga Times Free Press (Tennessee)

October 4, 2006 Wednesday

## Keep public access to EPA libraries

SECTION: TIMES; Pg. B6

LENGTH: 532 words

President Bush wholeheartedly supports the scientists, the evidence and the theories that jibe with his narrow world view. The people, the information and the postulates that run counter to his beliefs are targeted by disinformation campaigns. If that fails to force science to conform to his partisan policy, the administration uses distortion or censorship to promote its goals.

The latest attempt to manage scientific data is the effort to gut the Environmental Protection Agency Library Network. The Bush budget for the coming year proposes reducing funds for the network from \$2.5 million annually to \$500,000. If approved, the reduction would force closure of libraries containing the largest mass of environmental information extant. That would suit the administration just fine.

It prefers to restrict access to the papers, studies, data and technical information which the EPA and interested scientists need to do their work. The shortfall similarly would make it extremely difficult to access the data from three decades of study of the United States' environment and its relationship to pollution and health. The lack of access, not coincidentally, would make it tough to mine information inimical to Mr. Bush's skewed environmental policy.

Censorship in the form of removing access to information, along with simply changing the facts to meet a preconceived point, are tried-and-true practices of this administration. When overwhelming evidence pointed to mankind's direct effect on global warming, the administration ordered the damaging reports edited to soften the case. Ditto when statistics on mercury emissions from the nation's power plants contradicted administration policy. When rewriting reports or throwing up a wall between useful data and the public don't work, the administration simply changes the playing field.

Bush operatives frequently use the alleged need for secrecy to their advantage when it comes to science. Goodness knows how many once available reports and documents have been reclassified as secret to keep information from scientists and the general public. Forcing the closure of the EPA Library Network continues the trend.

Even before the proposed cut, the network was in disarray. The headquarters library shut down at the beginning of the month and a handful of regional libraries already are closed. The closures make it difficult for the EPA to do its job -- particularly the enforcement that often depends on documentation in the library network -- and next to impossible for scientists and interested citizens to obtain information.

Bush defenders argue that the closures aren't harmful and that plans to digitize the network's holdings will provide adequate public accessibility. Nonsense. If the budget is cut, there will be no money to build or to disseminate electronic files, or to pay for the knowledgeable staff that even a reduced network requires.

Congress should put an end to the administration's misguided effort to manage the flow of scientific information. It should reject the emasculation of the EPA Library Network and, instead, provide ample funds for it to operate as a library should -- in the public rather than partisan interest.

# Sarasota Herald-Tribune (Florida)

July 17, 2006 Monday  
ALL EDITION

## Ensure access to EPA data; Congress should restore funding for research libraries

SECTION: A SECTION; Pg. A10

LENGTH: 383 words

A proposed, shortsighted federal budget cut could put crucial information on emergency preparedness, anti-pollution enforcement and the public health out of the reach of scientists and the general citizenry.

The Bush administration has proposed cutting \$2 million of the Environmental Protection Agency's \$2.5 million budget for its network of technical research libraries.

The 80 percent cut would force the closure of most if not all of the EPA's 28 libraries in 19 states.

EPA scientists, engineers and other technical workers are leading the protests against the proposed cut. The presidents of four public-employee unions, representing 10,000 EPA employees, sent a strongly worded letter last month to congressional appropriators.

The letter contends that:

\* The EPA's ability to respond to emergencies would be reduced because of diminished access to "the latest research on cutting-edge homeland security and public-health" issues.

\* Some 50,000 original research documents would be completely inaccessible because they're not available electronically.

\* The public and academic researchers could lose all access to EPA library materials because public services are being cut and there are no plans to maintain the inter-library loan system.

The letter says EPA managers are not waiting for the proposed cut to take effect. The libraries are closing, it states, "one more example of the Bush administration's effort to suppress information on environmental and public-health related topics."

It's hard to see what other motive the Bush administration could have, considering how little money the \$2 million cut would save in a proposed 2007 budget for the EPA that totals \$7.3 billion.

And whether there would be any savings at all is in question. The group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility cited EPA internal studies showing that providing full library access saves an estimated 214,000 hours in professional staff time worth about \$7.5 million annually.

Closing the EPA libraries certainly isn't in the interest of the public, which deserves to have a strong foundation of research as the basis of government environmental and public-health policies and regulations.

Congress should find the \$2 million in budget savings elsewhere and ensure the EPA's library system stays in circulation.

# Hartford Courant (Connecticut)

September 12, 2006 Tuesday  
STATEWIDE EDITION

## EPA MOVES TO CLOSE LIBRARIES

SECTION: EDITORIAL; Pg. A10

LENGTH: 216 words

In a bureaucratic form of hara-kiri, the federal Environmental Protection Agency is boxing up records and shutting down three of its regional libraries in anticipation of federal budget cuts.

Libraries in Dallas, Chicago and Kansas City will close at the end of this month. Public access to records will be curtailed -- all in anticipation of the new federal budget year beginning in October.

The Bush administration is proposing a \$2 million cut in the EPA's library budget, and managers at the agency aren't even waiting for Congress to act.

What this means is that libraries serving 15 Midwestern and Southern states -- a veritable mother lode of scientific and regulatory information -- will be closed down. Hours at the seven remaining regional libraries will be reduced. Developers, researchers, state and local regulators and citizens who use these libraries to gain access to unique documents and studies about hazardous chemicals, ``Superfund" sites, water-quality data and regional ecosystems, will have to look elsewhere.

Much of the information still will be available on the Internet. But locating it will be more difficult -- even for EPA employees. Records that haven't been digitized may become unavailable for years until they are. It's no way to foster good environmental regulation.

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## **OTHER VOICES**

### **Access denied**

SACRAMENTO BEE

Wednesday, October 04, 2006

It's hardly news at this point when the Bush administration cuts off access to information.

This administration has rewritten scientific reports to reflect administration views (such as those on climate change and power plant mercury emissions). It has reclassified formerly public documents (such as the numbers of missiles in the Cold War era).

Still, it's noteworthy that the administration is chopping the Environmental Protection Agency Library Network budget from \$2.5 million to \$500,000, thus closing many EPA libraries. The closures already have begun — though Congress hasn't yet passed the Bush budget proposal.

This isn't about saving money. It's about shutting down access to information on the nation's environmental efforts compiled since the 1970s.

The 26 libraries form the largest environmental information network in the world, providing professional research and database assistance, reports, case studies, baseline data and technical documents for EPA scientific and enforcement staff — and the public. This information is key to the EPA's work.

The EPA earlier closed three regional libraries that provided services for 15 states. Call one, and you now get a message telling you the library is "permanently closed" and advising you to call a hotline if you have "general environmental questions." The EPA Headquarters Library in Washington, D.C., closed Oct. 1.

The documents — many of which can be found nowhere else — are now in boxes with no schedule for when they will become available. In a June letter to Congress, more than 10,000 EPA employees said that some records are simply being dispersed or disposed of with no checks to make sure important documents aren't lost.

The EPA says it eventually wants to make its collections available electronically. But the EPA has only about 13,000 electronic documents. If the library budget is decimated, how will the EPA digitize the rest of its collection for electronic access?

Clearly, the closures will make it much harder and more time-consuming for the public and EPA staff to access information. It will also be more difficult for EPA staff to prepare scientific documentation for proposed actions. In the past, if the EPA went after a polluter in court and the judge asked for documentation, EPA staff could ask a library to find the information and get it to the court quickly. Those days are over.

Closing EPA libraries is yet another step in curtailing access to decades of scientific research on pollution and public health.

But it's not too late to reverse course. Congress hasn't yet passed the budget and should restore the tiny, cost-effective \$2.5 million budget for the EPA Library Network.

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## Sacramento Bee (California)

October 2, 2006 Monday  
METRO FINAL EDITION

### Information denied; Closing EPA libraries shuts out the public

SECTION: EDITORIALS; Pg. B4

LENGTH: 447 words

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## Science News

July 15, 2006

### Close your books: cuts, shutdowns loom for EPA libraries; Environmental Protection Agency

BYLINE: Harder, B.

SECTION: Pg. 35(1) Vol. 170 No. 3 ISSN: 0036-8423

LENGTH: 529 words

Some regional libraries maintained by the Environmental Protection Agency will permanently shut their doors because of a proposed cut to their funding, agency librarians and former librarians say. Several libraries have already cut staff and hours, and others are preparing to close by Sept. 30.

The funding cut, advanced by the administration in its proposed budget for 2007, will save U.S. taxpayers about \$2 million in direct annual expenses. However, union representatives of thousands of EPA employees maintain that the change will squander the agency's money in the long run.

The proposed budget cut will affect 10 regional libraries and the headquarters library, which operate on a budget of \$3.5 million, EPA says.

"In the next year, I imagine, most of them will be closed," says Chicago-based Charles Orzechoskie of the American Federation of Government Employees. That union, which represents about half of EPA's staff, protested the budget cut in a June 29 letter to Congress.

A recent EPA-sponsored study estimated that the 11 affected libraries and 2 other major libraries generated between \$13.5 million and \$35.7 million in annual value at a cost of \$6.2 million. Last year, regional-library staff conducted some 85,000 data searches on behalf of EPA staff. The librarians also performed other services, including thousands of searches for non-EPA users of the libraries.

Closing the libraries will reduce or eliminate the EPA scientists' access to tens of thousands of unique documents, Orzechoskie says.

"We're concerned about the public's access too," he says. EPA-regulated businesses and state officials are among those who frequently use the libraries' services.

Some people outside the agency also express concern about the budget cut.

"It's an affront to the public's right to know," says Carol M. Browner, former head of EPA, who is now an attorney in Washington, D.C. For some communities, says Browner, a particular EPA library may be the "only point of access" to certain records about local environmental hazards.

The agency is digitizing unique documents from the libraries' collections and plans to make them freely available online. This week, an agency statement said, "Once the digitization effort is completed, there will be greater access to EPA collections for both EPA employees and the public."

Unique documents from the regional collections can be digitized in the next 6 to 9 months, the agency estimates. But several librarians expressed skepticism, saying that it might take years to transfer the collections to the Web.

"I'm a big booster of electronic format, [but] it doesn't stand by itself," says Bernadine Abbott Hoduski of Helena, Mont., a retired EPA librarian. Without librarians to help them, she says, scientists will struggle to find data that they seek.

Some library staff have been laid off or have left in anticipation of budget cuts.

"We're losing the institutional memory with all these people leaving," says librarian Fred Stoss of the State University of New York at Buffalo, who cochairs the environment task force of the American Library Association. "We don't think they'll be able to migrate everything from print to online quickly enough."

# National Public Radio (NPR)

September 29, 2006 Friday

SHOW: Talk of the Nation: Science Friday 3:00 PM EST

## Critics Protest Plans to Shutter EPA Libraries

ANCHORS: IRA FLATOW

LENGTH: 2642 words

IRA FLATOW, host:

You're listening to TALK OF THE NATION: SCIENCE FRIDAY. I'm Ira Flatow.

And for the rest of the hour a look at administration plans to close libraries of the Environmental Protection Agency.

In case you don't regularly read the Federal Register - oh, you don't? - you may have missed this announcement last week. Effective October 1, the headquarters library of the EPA will close its doors to walk-in patrons and visitors. The announcement cites budgetary cuts and an increasing shift toward Internet retrieval of documents as reasons for the cuts.

Other regional libraries of the EPA are also scheduled to be shuttered. A Kansas City branch will be closed to the public at 4:30 today. The Chicago branch is already closed.

But not everyone agrees that closing the libraries is a good way to save money. Unions representing 10,000 EPA scientists have protested the closings, saying there are no concrete plans for making the documents available electronically or through inter-library loan.

So for the rest of the hour we're going to be talking about that with folks who are interested. Jeff Ruch is executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. That's a non-government organization representing scientists and others who work at state and government agencies, such as the Fish and Wildlife Service and the EPA.

We asked the EPA to furnish us with a spokesperson but they refused. Jeff Ruch joins us by phone from Washington. Welcome to SCIENCE FRIDAY.

Mr. JEFF RUCH (Executive Director, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility): Good afternoon.

FLATOW: Tell us a little bit about this group. What is PEER?

Mr. RUCH: We're a service organization for people that work in these environmental agencies. And during the Bush years we've been kind of a giant battered staff shelter.

In this case, EPA employees came to us and told us about these plans and asked us to publicize what was going on in hopes that by starting a public dialogue it would force the agency management to reconsider what they were doing.

FLATOW: So you don't - so you don't actually work for the government itself?

Mr. RUCH: No.

FLATOW: Right.

Mr. RUCH: Most of us consist of former public employees who have left public service because they've had what we call peer-like experience. But no, we're a non-profit service organization.

FLATOW: Now a press release put out by the EPA says that "all EPA-generated materials will continue to be available through inter-library loans. To date, more than 15,000 EPA documents are already available through the EPA's public Web site."

What's wrong with that if you can get everything on the Web?

Mr. RUCH: Well, if you can get everything on the Web that would be great. But from what we know in talking to the librarians and others, there are tens of thousands of unique documents that are going to be - the term that the EPA used was in stasis for an indefinite period of time.

Just at the headquarters library alone there's 380,000 microfiche documents that nobody knows what's going to happen with them. So the idea of making this all available to EPA staff and the public through the Web would be a great idea.

But since they're saying they have a lack of money and the budget is scheduled to be cut, and they have no money budgeted to either digitize this or even catalog what these tens of thousands of documents they've boxed up, nobody knows how and when they're going to pull this off.

FLATOW: So you don't sound like you're convinced that the monetary reason is the whole reason why the EPA is shutting down these libraries.

Mr. RUCH: No. It's a little more than a \$2 million cut in a nearly \$8 billion agency. So as far as economies go, it's an odd one. And the EPA's own studies show that the library expenditures save between \$2 and \$6 for every dollar invested.

One of the documents we published was one from their prosecution branch, the enforcement branch, saying that this is going to hamper their ability to enforce anti-pollution laws because the prosecutors and the investigators now rely on the librarians to assemble information about the chemicals and also the industries.

In the absence of the librarians, all the staff are going to have to become their own librarians, and that's going to be much less efficient.

FLATOW: Mm-hmm. Give us an example of how the workings of EPA officials might be affected by the closing down of some of these libraries.

Mr. RUCH: Well, besides the enforcement example, one of the other libraries that's shut down is the one at Fort Meade in Maryland that has several thousand unique holdings concerning the Chesapeake Bay. And what's at issue here is that basically nothing that EPA did prior to 1990 is available in electronic form. It's all hard copy. So all of the original holdings that describe the condition of the Chesapeake in prior decades are unavailable to anybody, and so somebody trying to develop strategies for cleaning up the Chesapeake or to have baseline information to develop new rules is going to be hampered for - what we can tell - no particularly good reason.

FLATOW: And you say in your news release that prosecuting polluters will be more difficult. Are you speaking about polluters in Chesapeake or just in general?

Mr. RUCH: Just in general. The memo that's on our Web site, which comes from the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance details a number of operational ways in which the investigations and the administrative and civil and criminal prosecutions of polluters are going to be hampered because they have much less ready access to data once the libraries are closed.

FLATOW: Let's go to Andrew in Norman, Oklahoma. Hi, Andrew.

ANDREW (Caller): Hi.

FLATOW: Hi there.

ANDREW: Hi. I was wondering about some of the legality issues with the EPA being funded by the government. Is there some kind of, you know, way that they can guarantee that all these public documents will be disclosed in some fashion, or what kind of ways are there for them to do this if they're closing these libraries?

FLATOW: You're saying basically this is taxpayer-paid documents. We should be able to get to them.

ANDREW: Right. I mean, we paid for it, so...

Mr. RUCH: In theory, people could submit Freedom of Information Act requests for documents, assuming they knew that they existed. That is going to be very cumbersome, and given the volume of the material we're talking about, I'm not sure it's going to be that effective. I wish there were a broader law, because we would sue under it if we could find it, that required the government to make available its highest quality information.

The thing that's kind of troublesome about this is that the Bush administration proposed this as part of their plan for the fiscal year that begins this Sunday, on October 1, for the FY07 fiscal year. But without waiting for Congress to act on it, they've gone ahead and begun to implement it. So they're cutting down - they're shutting libraries in anticipation that Congress is going to go along with the cut, and we're urging Congress, assuming that it ever gets around to acting on the budget - and they're late - they've just - they're in the process of passing a continuing resolution to fund the government until mid-November - that once Congress actually considers it, we would urge Congress to do its job and tell the administration to fund the libraries. But that requires getting Congress's attention in, you know, a lame- duck session in which there may be widespread Attention Deficit Disorder.

FLATOW: Are documents already being moved out of the libraries?

Mr. RUCH: Yes. In many cases the libraries that you talked about, in Dallas, in Kansas City, Chicago and now headquarters, as well as a number of specialty libraries that are attached to laboratories and other technical centers, have already been boxed up and moved to storage areas or cafeterias.

As we understand EPA's plan, they're going to take all of this material and put them in three what they call repositories. The process they call is de-accessioning, which is a word we'd never heard of before, but it's the process by which access to them is denied. As we understand these repositories, which there's no money to staff them, they're really just giant dumps, and the information is going to sit there until some unknown future time when they can be unpacked, re-catalogued, and hopefully digitized.

FLATOW: You know, it seems like ever since Christie Todd Whitman resigned from the EPA early on in the administration, the EPA has just been under constant criticism and attack by other scientists.

Mr. RUCH: Well, this has not been the golden age for science at EPA. As a matter of fact, I recently testified with the chair of their scientific advisory panel, and he was saying that the cuts in research are such that EPA can no longer field a coherent research program. Unfortunately, I wish I could say that things are looking up. We have displayed on our Web site also a document from the agency's chief financial officer on their plans for FY2008, which begins a year from Sunday, in which their plan is to begin closing laboratories as well as furloughing scientists and offering buyouts.

And in this agency, which has a demographic that skews a little bit older than most of the agencies, that tend to be heavily Baby Boomer, between more than a third, close to almost half of the scientists are at or nearing retirement age, and so there's going to be a natural attrition anyway. If you add generous buyouts to that, at the end of that process you're going to end up with an agency that is much, much smaller, and a lot of the institutional memory of the Environmental Protection Agency will be gone.

FLATOW: 1-800-989-8255 is our number, talking with Jeff Ruch, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. I guess the only thing any of our listeners can do is to call their Congressional office if they're interested.

Mr. RUCH: That's what we would urge, and since this is going to be taken up after the election - I don't know the extent of the leverage - but this item is so small it's not even its own line item. It's going to take members of Congress to affirmatively dig in to the budget to exercise their power of the purse to order that the libraries stay open.

FLATOW: Let's go to phones. Let's go to Jacob in Kansas City. Hi, Jacob. Cass City. I'm sorry, Cass City, Michigan. Jacob. Jacob, are you there?

JACOB (Caller): I have a question.

FLATOW: Yes.

JACOB: Has this been talked about for a while, or did they just come out of the blue and basically say this is what we're going to do to save money and we're just going to shut it down to the public and, you know, store all these documents?

Mr. RUCH: The Bush administration didn't go public until we started posting the internal documents. We first started posting documents indicating these were the plans in February, right after the president's State of the Union message, in which we contrasted his call, which seems like a long time ago, for the federal government to start to engage in cutting edge research, contrast that call with shutting the libraries. The agency's been responding a little bit, but for the most part this was publicly known in mid-February.

JACOB: And wouldn't closing the laboratories be against the - basically the better interest of the public? I mean, isn't that the whole point of the EPA, is to basically make sure that we're not polluting? And I mean it just seems like it would be in the administration's best interest to keep such an agency open and not want to shut it down.

Mr. RUCH: I can't really speak to what is in their best interest. The - I think it's clear that the EPA is not one of the favored children of this administration. The proposal for this current year would shrink their budget by 100 million, and they're talking about much, much bigger cuts in the following years. All of these programs, EPA included, that are called discretionary domestic programs, are under the president's overall fiscal plan scheduled for big cutbacks to pay for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the tax cuts. And so this is part of - part of a larger what they call deficit-management strategy.

FLATOW: Talking about the future of the EPA libraries this hour on TALK OF THE NATION Science Friday from NPR News. Talking with Jeff Ruch, executive director of PEER. Jeff, how do you get people excited about this in a year where there's so much else going on?

Mr. RUCH: It's somewhat difficult. We've been greatly and pleasantly surprised by how active the library community is outside of EPA. So a number of people see what happens in the EPA today potentially happening to them tomorrow. So we've been surprised, given that this is such a small program, at how much attention it's gathered already.

FLATOW: And you have - you said 10,000 members?

Mr. RUCH: Ten-thousand EPA scientists, engineers and other specialists had their representatives sign on to a letter of protest that in essence said to the head of EPA this is going to make it much more difficult for us all to do our jobs.

FLATOW: Let's go to an anonymous caller, if we have one there. Go ahead. Glen in Grand Rapids, go ahead. Glen, are you there? We missed Glen in Grand Rapids.

So where do you go? You just have to wait until someone turns a sympathetic ear to the campaign you're on now for getting some public notice?

Mr. RUCH: That or it is very possible that one or both houses of Congress change hands next year, and Democratic members have already called for reviews of the prudence of these cuts. And so if there is a change, it's possible that these library closures could be undone, or this could all be done in a better way.

One of the things that has everyone sort of scratching their heads is that if the plan was to modernize access, the way they've gone about has been almost completely bass-ackwards, because they haven't done any kind of survey of what their holdings are and they're not prioritizing what gets digitized because they have no idea what it is they have.

This is so screwed up that when they first proposed it - and this is the one bit of progress we made - when they first proposed it they were also proposing to withdraw funding for their electronic card catalogue. And it was pointed out that if they did that nobody would be able to tell what holdings they had. They agreed to restore that half-million dollars, but that indicates that this is being driven by something other than intelligent information management policies.

FLATOW: It seems ironic that you're looking for the Democrats to bail you out, where the EPA was created under a Republican administration, Richard Nixon.

Mr. RUCH: Well, this town is awash in irony right now. But as I said, Congress has not even acted on EPA's budget, and so they're going to go into next year on a continuing resolution, and because of that abdication of oversight, the administration is going to be free to re-allocate funds pretty much as it sees fit. And that means that by the time Congress finally gets around to doing what it's supposed to be doing, a lot of these units are going to be closed.

FLATOW: So you want that squeaky wheel to start making noise.

Mr. RUCH: Yes, because, I mean, one of the - it's not just what happens to the EPA scientists and enforcement staff, but one thing that's also clear is that public access to these holdings is basically ending. And so the ability of local groups to find out information about, say, a Superfund site in their neighborhood or about a chemical that's suddenly been found in a drinking water well, those kind of things are just being thrown out the window.

FLATOW: Jeff Ruch, I want to thank you for taking time to be with us today.

Mr. RUCH: Thank you for having me.

FLATOW: Jeff Ruch, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.

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