

## The Context of the Strategic Plan

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) mission is to protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment—air, water, and land—upon which life depends. Science supports this mission by providing EPA and the American people with the knowledge needed to make informed decisions about risks to human health and the environment, and with opportunities to prevent or mitigate these risks. Within EPA, the Office of Research and Development provides leadership in science and engineering, and conducts most of the Agency's research and development. Through research and technical assistance, ORD provides the scientific foundation for EPA's regulatory programs and decisions, assesses the state of the environment, identifies new issues of potential concern, and provides information and tools to support risk-based decisions.

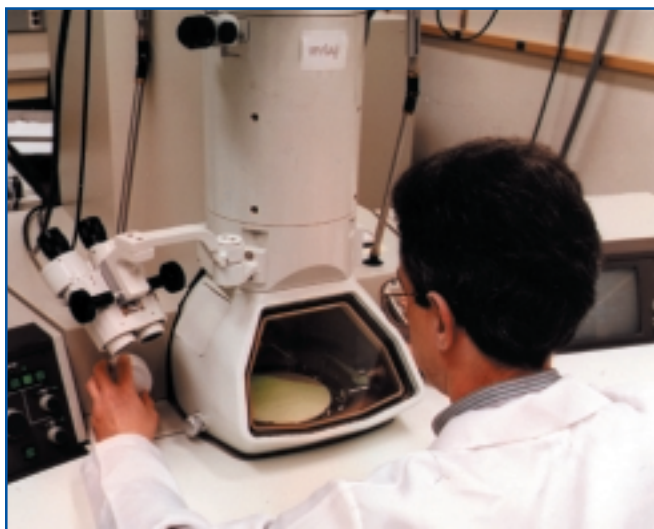
### The Purpose of This Plan

ORD's *Strategic Plan* is the latest stage in a multi-year effort to improve ORD's organizational effectiveness and research program. This *Plan* describes ORD's organizational goals and the actions we will take over the next decade to achieve these goals. In so doing, we will ensure that our science continues to be of high quality, timely, relevant, and responsive.

This *Plan* does not alter our research priorities, which are the product of a careful and comprehensive Agency-wide planning process. Instead, this *Plan* focuses on ORD as an organization and serves as the roadmap for how we will work together and organize our activities over the next 10 years to more efficiently and effectively support EPA's mission. Rather than concentrating on *what* research we will do, this *Plan* sets direction for *how* we will accomplish our mission.

### Background

ORD's *Strategic Plan* builds on the evolution in ORD's organizational structure and research planning that began in the mid-1990s in response to a number of external



reviews of EPA's research programs, as well as a Congressional directive that EPA examine its overall laboratory structure. In 1995, as a result of these reviews and a strong internal desire to strengthen and better focus our research program, ORD implemented the most sweeping reorganization in its history.

The scientific rationale for the new structure was the scientific risk assessment/risk management paradigm—a sequenced set of specific interrelated analytic steps that are employed in assessing environmental risks and making decisions on how to reduce those risks. Simply stated, these steps involve a process to: 1) characterize the nature and magnitude of human health or environmental effects; 2) determine the magnitude and routes of exposure to causative contaminants or stressors; 3) combine these into an assessment of risk; and, 4) evaluate sources and implement strategies or technologies to reduce risk. Using this organizing principle, ORD combined 12 existing laboratories into three National Laboratories (covering environmental effects, exposure, and risk management) and a National Center for Environmental Assessment which mirror the four components of the paradigm.

### ORD Is Composed of Three Laboratories, Two Centers, and Two Offices

These are:

- National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory
- National Exposure Research Laboratory
- National Risk Management Research Laboratory
- National Center for Environmental Assessment
- National Center for Environmental Research
- Office of Science Policy
- Office of Resources Management and Administration

At the same time, ORD created a National Center for Environmental Research to manage an enlarged and strengthened competitive extramural grants and fellowship program. Two Headquarter Offices were formed to provide support and oversight, the Office of Science Policy and the Office of Resources Management and Administration (see Appendix A for the ORD Organizational Chart).

Following the reorganization, ORD published a Strategic Plan in May 1996. The 1996 Plan proposed evaluating research and development priorities based on comparative risk—or, stated in different terms, on reducing uncertainty about the potentially greatest risks. The 1996 Plan, which was updated in 1997, outlined ORD’s high-priority research topics and included their strategic focus, key elements, anticipated research products, and intended uses. The 1996 Plan and its 1997 update also set in motion an effort to develop a series of externally peer-reviewed research strategies and plans describing the rationale, strategic direction, and key components of ORD’s research program.

In 1997, EPA also implemented the *Government Performance and Results Act of 1993* (GPRA) which resulted in additional changes for ORD. The Agency produced a comprehensive Strategic Plan and restructured its budget around 10 Agency-wide Goals. The Agency also prepared its first Annual Performance Plan and Congressional Justification for 1999 in accordance with the new GPRA structure. This Annual Plan included Performance Goals and Measures that would be accomplished with the proposed budget. It is this process that ORD now uses to plan its research and development program and is discussed in further detail later in this document.

Concurrently, ORD has taken the lead in looking broadly at EPA science by drafting the January 2000 *Strategic Framework for EPA Science*. The Framework contains three unifying principles for EPA science: use of the Agency-wide science inventory; effective planning (“doing the right science”); and sound science (“doing the science right”). EPA, through its Science Policy Council, has adopted and is implementing these principles in cross-agency science activities sponsored by the Council.



## The Future We Seek

ORD has developed this *Strategic Plan* as a path between our past and our future. The scientific priorities identified in our two previous strategic plans and the current EPA Strategic Plan still hold true. We are on track in providing high-quality, timely, relevant, and responsive scientific research and technical assistance to support EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment.

At the same time, we recognize that we face new challenges that will alter how we plan, conduct, and communicate science, how we view and anticipate environmental problems, and how we manage our organization. It is clear that the environmental issues that we will address in the next decade are increasingly complex, subtle, international, and interrelated. Similarly, the solutions required to address these issues will place a growing premium on sound science and risk-based decision-making.

Moreover, we face rising expectations from our partners, stakeholders, and the American people for more scientific information on: environmental and public health risks; how these risks may differ for different groups or different locations; and how they can be reduced in a cost-effective manner.

We recognize and embrace these challenges as opportunities to demonstrate the excellence of our work and the strength of our commitment to a safe and clean environment. This *Strategic Plan* will guide our efforts.

## How This Plan Was Developed

The *Plan* focuses on five strategic organizational goals that were originally drafted by ORD's Executive Council. The ORD Executive Council is composed of the Assistant Administrator for Research and Development, the Deputy Assistant Administrators for Management and for Science, and the Directors of ORD's Laboratories, Centers, and Offices.

Meetings with the workforce were held throughout our locations to discuss the goals, what they meant, why they were important, and how we might achieve them. These meetings, and much of the other consultation with our workforce, were organized and coordinated by the Strategic Plan Workgroup, which included representatives throughout the organization.

In addition, many other staff members actively participated in developing this *Strategic Plan* through goal writing teams that were established for each of the five goals. Each team was responsible for using the diverse input collected to develop the specific objectives, actions, and measures of success under each goal. Whatever success derives from this *Strategic Plan* belongs to all those who participated in its development.

