

Preparing Focused, Concise and Timely Environmental Assessments

In those situations where:

- there is no statutory exemption from NEPA requirements,
- there is no categorical exclusion available, either because the agency has none that covers the activity or there are extraordinary circumstances,
- the proposed recovery/response actions are not covered in an existing NEPA analysis (EA or EIS), and
- the expected environmental impacts of the proposed recovery/response action is not considered to be significant,

a concise and focused environmental assessment can be prepared in a short time.

The following outline with notations addresses the core elements of an EA:

- the need for the proposal,
- alternatives as required by NEPA section 102(2)(E),
- the environmental impacts of your proposed action and the alternatives, and
- the agencies and persons consulted. 40 CFR 1508.9

Need for the Proposal

- Briefly describe information that substantiates the need for the project; incorporate by reference information that is reasonably available to the public. [*For example: This agency is preparing to erect a temporary emergency response facility to replace facilities disrupted or destroyed by hurricane Katrina in order to facilitate rescue and/or relief efforts in an effort to [minimize further death/ adverse health conditions/restore communications/restore power.]*]
- Briefly describe the existing conditions, the projected future conditions of the area impacted by the project. [*For example: The area(s) in which the temporary facility will be located or relocated is identified in the attached map. This area consists of [add brief description of the environmental state of the area that will be affected by the location and operation of the facility, focusing on those areas that are potentially sensitive – the goal is to show that refueling sites are not on top of aquifers, nesting areas, graves, sacred sites etc – these are examples to show the utility and need to identify actual place based environmental issues rather than compiling laundry lists of environmental resources that are not at issue.]*]

Proposed Action and Alternatives

- List and briefly describe your proposed action and any alternatives that meet the project purposes. You have discretion as to the number of alternatives. [*The alternatives should be focused by the purpose and need statement. For example, the need to use existing infrastructure necessary to support the facility is a potential basis for focusing on a discreet number of alternatives*]
- When there is consensus about the proposed action based on input from interested parties, you can consider the proposed action and proceed without consideration of

additional alternatives. Otherwise, you need to develop reasonable alternatives to meet project needs. (NEPA section 102(2)(E)). [*see the note above*]

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and Alternatives

- .. Describe the environmental impacts of your proposed action and each alternative. Your alternatives must meet the purpose and need. Your description should provide enough information to support a determination to either prepare an environmental impact statement or find no significant impact.
- .. Concentrate on whether the action would “significantly” affect the quality of the human environment. You should use CEQ’s definition of “significantly,” 40 CFR 1508.27, as a general guide and, where applicable, cite to agency guidance, policies, monitoring and experience, including significance determinations documented in related or analogous NEPA decisions [*Use your agency NEPA contacts and contacts at resource agencies to assist*].
- .. Tailor the length of your discussion to the complexity of the each issue. [*Focus on those human and natural environment issues where impacts are a concern – telephone or e-mail, discussions with local, Tribal, and state agencies and other federal agencies that operate in the area will help focus those issue*]
- .. You may discuss the impacts (direct, indirect and cumulative) of each alternative together in a comparative description or discuss each alternative separately [*Use the approach that will be most effective in the time available*].
- .. You may contrast the impacts of the proposed action and alternatives with the current condition and expected future condition in the absence of the project. This constitutes consideration of a no-action alternative as well as demonstrating the need for the project.
- .. Incorporate by reference data, inventories, other information and analyses you relied on. The use of hyperlinks in web-based documents is encouraged. This information must be reasonably available to the public. [*For example, include relevant existing programmatic agreements and generally accepted best management practices.*]
- .. You should be clear and concise about your conclusions.

Agencies and Persons Consulted.

- .. List the agencies and persons consulted. [*For example, include the people/offices/agencies that you coordinated with to ensure that the location of the project did not unintentionally cause an adverse impact – coordination to comply with substantive environmental requirements such as any coordination under the CWA, ESA or NHPA. Note that the ESA emergency provisions at 50 CFR 402.05 may be applicable.*]

Note: CEQ provided similar guidance at:

http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/guidance_for_environmental_assessments.pdf