

PEER REVIEW AND PEER INVOLVEMENT AT THE U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

This document establishes the policy of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for peer review of scientifically and technically based work products, including economic and social science products, that are intended to inform Agency decisions. Peer review, a form of *peer involvement*, is one process through which EPA staff augment their capabilities by inviting independent subject-matter experts to provide objective evaluation of the work product.

PEER REVIEW

EPA strives to ensure that the scientific and technical bases of its decisions meet two important criteria: (1) they are based upon the best current knowledge from science, engineering, and other domains of technical expertise; and (2) they are credible. Peer review, a process based on the principles of obtaining the best technical and scientific expertise with appropriate independence, is central to sound science and helps the Agency meet these important criteria. Peer review occurs when scientifically and technically based work products are evaluated by relevant experts who were not involved in creating the product. Properly applied, peer review not only enriches the quality of work products but also adds a degree of credibility that cannot be achieved in any other way. Furthermore, peer review early in the development of work products in some cases may conserve future resources by steering the development along the most efficacious course.

Peer review generally takes one of two approaches:

- Internal, in which the reviewers are independent experts from inside EPA.
- External, in which the reviewers are independent experts from outside EPA.

POLICY STATEMENT

Peer review of all scientific and technical information that is intended to inform or support Agency decisions is encouraged and expected. Influential scientific information, including highly influential scientific assessments, should be peer reviewed in accordance with the Agency's Peer Review Handbook. All Agency managers are accountable for ensuring that Agency policy and guidance are appropriately applied in determining if their work products are influential or highly influential, and for deciding the nature, scope, and timing of their peer review. For highly influential scientific assessments, external peer review is the expected procedure. For influential scientific information intended to support important decisions, or for work products that have special importance in their own right, external peer review is the approach of choice. Peer review is not restricted to the nearly final version of work products; in fact, peer review at the planning stage can often be extremely beneficial.

LEGAL EFFECT

This policy statement does not establish or affect legal rights or obligations. Rather, it confirms the importance of peer review where appropriate, outlines relevant principles, and identifies factors Agency staff should consider in implementing the policy. On a continuing basis, Agency management is expected to evaluate the policy as well as the results of its application throughout the Agency and undertake revisions as necessary. Therefore, the policy does not stand alone; nor does it establish a binding norm that is finally determinative of the issues addressed.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Science Policy Council is responsible for overseeing Agency-wide implementation of this policy, including: promoting consistent interpretation; assessing Agency-wide progress; developing recommendations for revisions of the policy as necessary; and issuing the *Peer Review Handbook*, which provides additional information and procedures on implementing this policy. Assistant Administrators, Regional Administrators, and other senior managers remain ultimately responsible for ensuring the appropriate application of Agency policy and guidance in identifying work products subject to peer review, determining the type and timing of such review, documenting the process and outcome of each peer review, ensuring that the Science Inventory is kept current, and otherwise implementing the policy within their organizational units.

The policy is effective immediately.

APPROVED: 

STEPHEN L. JOHNSON, ADMINISTRATOR

DATE: JAN 31 2006



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

JAN 31 2006

THE ADMINISTRATOR

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Peer Review Program

TO: Assistant Administrators
General Counsel
Inspector General
Associate Administrators
Regional Administrators
Staff Office Directors

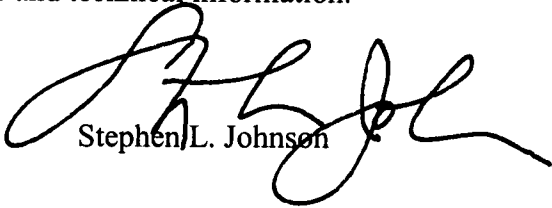
We have made tremendous strides in improving our peer review program at EPA since the Agency's Peer Review Policy was reaffirmed in 1994. Today I am updating the Peer Review Policy to emphasize the critical role that peer review plays in our efforts to ensure that EPA's decisions rest on sound, credible science and data (see attached policy statement).

Peer review at EPA takes several different forms, ranging from informal consultations with Agency colleagues who were not involved in developing the product to the formal, public processes of the Science Advisory Board (SAB) and the FIFRA Scientific Advisory Panel (SAP). In any form, peer review assists EPA's work by bringing independent expert experience and judgment to bear on issues before the Agency to the benefit of the final product.

In 1994 the Science Policy Council (SPC) and its Steering Committee were asked to undertake an initiative to ensure that EPA has a comprehensive Agency-wide program for implementing its Peer Review Policy. I commend the SPC for its diligence and success in meeting this objective. The SPC has made substantial improvements in the Peer Review Handbook, sponsored training of Agency managers and staff in peer review procedures, identified scientific and technical work products that merit peer review, and developed a publicly available data base of the peer review activities across the Agency. EPA has a strong and well-recognized peer review program as a direct result of these efforts.

In 2004 the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a “Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review” that contains provisions for peer review at all federal agencies. The OMB Bulletin applies to influential scientific information and highly influential scientific assessments. The SPC has updated the Agency’s Peer Review Handbook, in part to incorporate the provisions of the OMB Bulletin, and to reflect the experience gained from implementing the program over the last decade.

I ask that you continue to implement fully the provisions of our Peer Review Policy, and I expect the Science Policy Council to continue its role in overseeing and strengthening EPA’s peer review program. We must ensure that our decisions are based on the highest quality, peer-reviewed scientific and technical information.



Stephen L. Johnson

Attachment

cc: Science Policy Council
Science Policy Council Steering Committee