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11/14/2006 04:24

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RE: EPA Libraries

2007?(Document link:

happen in

Mimi Johnson)

Bill,

Thank you for the kind comments about the Chemical Library, but unless we get some sort of reprieve from GSA there are only three days left before we are scheduled to vacate the former EPA cafeteria. There doesn't appear to be much time to save it. And at this point I doubt if it would be worth it--the collection is virtually gone. (More on that below.)

One of the biggest problems is that EPA has not done a formal information audit or information needs analysis. What are the information needs of EPA staff? Of our partners like states, tribes, and other federal agencies? Of the public?

I think we have a good idea of what those needs are. In fact, as J. Timothy Sprehe noted at the very first EPA Web conference many years ago, "You don't have to do a survey because your front-line people know what subjects the public is interested in." Unfortunately, he didn't realize that many, if not most, of the front-line people were contractors. (Oh, dear -- we just got rid of a bunch of those. I think I just saw a nice chunk of institutional memory float by.)

Staff were an issue that Diane happened to raise. You can have all the resources imaginable, but if you have no one who knows that they're there or how to use them, the resources are not going to be used. (As to the Chemical Library in particular, our Reference Librarian was let go by the contractor a couple of weeks ago.)

A truly comprehensive information management solution would be to look at the libraries, the hotlines, the dockets, etc., and figure out ways to leverage those. The public wants answers. Does EPA need to provide all the answers? Yes and no. If answers includes referrals to appropriate sources, then yes. If not, then no. But who needs access to what in order to provide answers? And are we talking about internal users, or people outside the agency? Clearly, EPA needs to provide different levels of service to different clientele.

And I have to wonder about this. How many contractor libraries has EPA paid for by outsourcing program office research? And how many program offices subscribe to or purchase magazines and books?

The Chemical Library situation

Chemical & Engineering News published an item in the Nov. 6 issue, "EPA Closes Chemical Library." C&E News quotes Jessica Emond, EPA deputy press secretary, as saying, "Physical holdings of the OPPTS Chemical Library will be made available online, and other services will be made available electronically." (p. 16)

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