SECTION VI

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

Environmental Information Strategy

Background
EPA's cross-cutting environmental information strategy is to enhance environmental results through the improved use of quality environmental information by EPA decision makers, states, tribes, other partners and the public. EPA develops, collects, analyzes and provides access to information. Information is made available for developing policies and priorities and for decision making regarding environmental issues. Information must be accessible by all partners. The necessary infrastructure must be built and maintained to support secure, reliable access to information. Analytical tools to effectively use the information must also be developed.

New ways of conducting business are required to meet more complex information challenges, particularly the challenge of working effectively with many partners. To achieve EPA's mission, the information strategy will focus on three major areas:

1. Improve analytic capacity by providing access to tools that facilitate data interpretation and respond to environmental problems.

2. Improve governance by adopting an Agency-wide approach to managing information and information related investments.

3. Improve service delivery by working with partners to improve the effectiveness of environmental information systems.

Current Condition in Region 6
Ensuring data quality has been the primary regional emphasis to date. Data stewards in Region 6 work closely with national system owners and EPA partners to improve and maintain the quality of Agency data holdings. In addition to supporting national automated systems, the Region contributes products to the public access web server. A process is in place that permits the regulated community and the public in general to challenge the accuracy of EPA published information with the goal of improving the overall data quality. The Region 6 Quality Assurance Program is very active, providing training to states and tribes each year. Quality action plans are required for all grants involving environmental information. All Region 6 states have now been awarded One Stop Grants that encourage and facilitate development of automated, integrated environmental information management systems. **[The States of Arkansas and Louisiana cite the need to expand electronic reporting as a priority.]** The States of Arkansas and Texas cited the need for electronic permit applications capabilities as a priority.

Planned Strategies to Improve Program
An Agency-wide solution is required in order to support the integrated environmental information systems essential for the success of the program. Region 6 will actively support all initiatives of the EPA's Chief Information Officer. The Facility Registry System (FRS), data quality guidelines, and the National Environmental Information Exchange Network are examples of major initiatives of EPA's Office of Environmental Information receiving emphasis and support at the regional office level. The regions have taken the lead in the area of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), working in collaboration to improve and share GIS offerings.

Integrated environmental information of the highest quality is the foundation for a successful information management program. Data standards, data quality and data integration initiatives are receiving early emphasis. The single largest initiative and the cornerstone of EPA's enterprise architecture is the National Environmental Information Exchange Network. All Region 6 states and some tribes have begun activity to set up nodes on the exchange network. When fully operational, all EPA partners will be able to exchange information electronically without regard to differences in individual information technology infrastructures.

Long Term Strategic Goals
As a national approach to managing environmental information is essential, the Region's long range goals must be the same as the Agency goals set by the EPA Chief Information Officer.

- Improved use of environmental information to strengthen EPA's, state's, tribe's and the public's decisions.
- Improved Agency operation, including the security collection and exchange of information.
- A highly diverse, well- trained workforce able to benefit from information technology investments.
- Enhanced information integrity, analysis, and access.
- Build and maintain the necessary infrastructure using state-of-the-art hardware and software technologies to provide secure information, reliable data, efficient and timely access, and analytic information tools.

Current Year Goals

- Provide technical guidance to Exchange Network partners as requested.
- Provide technical/administrative guidance to Exchange Network grant applicants as requested.
- Complete annual Exchange Network grant selection process.
- Respond to all Requests for Changes (RFC) and Requests for Reconsideration (RFR0 submitted through the Information Quality Guidelines process involving Region 6.

Point of Contact : The Senior Information Resources Management Official is Lynda Carroll, Assistant Regional Administrator for Management. The Information Resources Management Branch Chief is Dorian Reines.

Regional Environmental Justice Strategy

The Environmental Justice movement began in the early 1990's. In response to growing national concern, in 1994, President Clinton signed E.O. 12898, directing EPA and other Federal agencies to focus attention on the impacts of environmental decisions on minority and low-income populations.

The EPA defines environmental justice as: *"The fair treatment of people of all races, incomes, and cultures with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. Fair treatment implies that no person or group of people should shoulder a disproportionate share of the negative environmental impacts resulting from the execution of this country's domestic and foreign policy programs."* Numerous studies have shown that there is a disproportionate burden of pollution and siting of pollution sources in minority and low-income communities. Environmental Justice aims to address the issue of equity by providing equal protection to all populations, including minority and low-income communities, and to eliminate the disproportionate impacts on these communities.

Environmental Justice aims to address the issue by ensuring that minority and low income populations receive equal protection and that those populations do not bear a disproportionate share of environmental impacts.

Early in the Environmental Justice movement, Region 6 took a leadership role. A major reason for this is the fact that Region 6 is home to approximately 60% of petrochemical manufacturing facilities in the nation. Also, approximately 40% of the nation's hazardous waste is generated in Region 6 with 45% being disposed here. Current U.S. Census Bureau figures indicate dramatically increasing growth in minority and low-income populations in Texas, Louisiana and New Mexico. Large industrial corridors such as the Mississippi River Corridor, U.S. Mexico Border and the Houston ship channel are also home to many minority and low-income populations. With our unique geographic location, and the concentration of petroleum and chemical manufacturing, hazardous waste generation, and treatment and disposal facilities, the Region faces a unique challenge in addressing the health, pollution, and regulatory issues that directly impact our minority and low-income communities.

Some of the major programs, processes and actions Region 6 currently uses to assist the Environmental Justice communities include the following:

- Grant Application Training for Environmental Justice communities - Once an Environmental Justice community is identified, Region 6 makes training available to the community through a team of EPA trainers. This training empowers communities to effectively compete for financial assistance to address specific local concerns.

- Environmental Justice Fundamentals Training - Region 6 uses this training to bring together stakeholders on different sides of difficult issues to foster communications in a non-threatening environment. Diverse stakeholders recently participated in a two-day training session at Kelly Air Force base and, as a result, agreement was reached to continue a process of dialogue. These participants are now working collaboratively on an interagency project called "Project Regeneration."

- Environmental Justice Grant Program - Environmental Justice communities are financially supported through the Environmental Justice Small Grant Program. Funds are provided through this program to Environmental Justice community-based groups to promote community empowerment, public participation and environmental awareness.

- State Agency Grant Program - Since a large portion of this Region's budget is directed to State Environmental Agencies, future grant agreements will include conditions that require States to address environmental justice issues within their respective jurisdictions.

- Environmental Justice Listening Sessions - In November 2002, Region 6, along with stakeholders, held its first regional Environmental Justice

- Listening session. In these sessions, Federal, State and local environmental agencies met with representatives of the Environmental Justice communities to listen to their issues, concerns, requests, and to identify solutions. These sessions were particularly effective in identifying local needs and providing a forum for the honest exchange of ideas and information. State agencies, including the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, the New Mexico Environment Department and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, are currently developing plans for Environmental Justice Listening Sessions in the near future.

- Partnerships - Region 6 fosters external partnerships between the Environmental Justice Communities, regional environmental organizations, industry and Federal, State and local governments to develop solutions for specific sites. For example, the Region works with community-based organizations, such as the Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (SNEEJ) and Louisiana Environmental Action Network (LEAN), to address Environmental Justice concerns.

- Region 6 Environmental Justice Program Management - Region 6 has developed an Environmental Justice Strategic Plan. This plan requires communications/information sharing throughout the Region through a seven-member Environmental Justice workgroup that represents each major environmental program. It also establishes a formal administrative process for handling Environmental Justice issues and requests for assistance. In addition, the strategic plan addresses training and awareness of Region 6 staff through EJ training. EPA utilizes a team of EPA and community-based trainers committed to providing EJ training. EJ training is provided to staff on a twice quarterly basis.

- Population Identification/Region 6 Index Methodology - As Region 6 processes air and water permits, develops enforcement strategies, plans superfund site cleanup actions and issues grant guidance, it is important that the Environmental Justice populations in the vicinity of these situations are identified and assisted. Environmental Justice communities are identified through the Region's Environmental Justice Index Methodology. This methodology combines geographic and U.S. Census data in such a way that vulnerable populations, which are located close to potential pollution sources, can be quickly and accurately identified.

- Communication - Traditional "public notice" methods have been expanded to include non-traditional means of communication such as community bulletin boards, minority and special interest media, and faith-based communities. We try to be as flexible as possible by extending public comment periods and setting meeting times and locations at non-traditional times and places.

Although Region 6 and its States have made significant strides in developing an effective Environmental Justice program, more can be done. In addition to continuing the programs and activities outlined above, Region 6 has set the following long term strategic goals:

- Empower EJ communities to identify and employ effective means to address concerns by providing them with proper tools and mechanisms such as: a) financial and technical assistance; b) access to information and public participation; c) forums such as EJ Listening Sessions; and d) local community/industry partnerships.

- Enhance employee awareness and sensitivity to EJ issues by providing EJ Fundamentals and advanced training. Training to EPA staff is offered twice each quarter and for external customers, including state governments, on an as-needed basis.

- Strengthen relationships/communications with EPA Program Offices and State DEQs and jointly develop processes to identify, prioritize, and address EJ issues in the Region.

FY 2004 Goals

- During FY 04, will assist 2 states in conducting EJ Listening Sessions.
- During FY 04, will conduct 4 EJ Fundamentals Training classes for EPA staff.

Reduction of Environmental Health Risks to Children and the Aging

Current Condition

Protecting our children continues to be one of the nation's highest priorities. Children are particularly vulnerable to environmental health risks because their systems, including their immune systems, are experiencing a time of rapid changes in growth and development. Each Regional program integrates protection of children and sensitive populations within their mission, be it the remediation of a Superfund Site, the reuse of a RCRA facility, setting cleanup goals for water sources, and enforcement of all environmental regulations.

Children are more exposed to environmental threats than adults. They eat proportionately more food, drink more fluids, breathe more air, and play outside more than adults. This means that children may breathe in or ingest more pollutants per pound of body weight. Children are least able to protect themselves, and their natural curiosity and tendency to explore leaves them open to health risks adults can more easily avoid. When young children play outside or crawl on the ground or floor, they are more exposed to potentially contaminated dust and soil, lead paint, household chemicals, and other potentially hazardous substances.

Among the environmental health threats affecting children are: asthma; lead poisoning; pesticides; contaminated drinking water; polluted surface waters; methyl mercury; toxic waste dumps--one in four Americans including 10 million children under the age of 12 live within four miles of a toxic waste dump; second-hand tobacco smoke; and over-exposure to ultraviolet light are also identified as environmental hazards to children.

In order to address the wide array of complex environmental threats to children's health, EPA announced a national policy to consistently and explicitly take into account health risks to children when conducting assessments of environmental risks. The policy directly responds to issues raised by the National Academy of Sciences 1993 report – *Pesticides in the Diets of Infants and Children.* Following the policy, for the first time children would be considered explicitly in all EPA risk-assessment and standard-setting procedures.

A 1996 report by the EPA on Environmental Health Threats to children described how and why children are affected by various environmental threats to their health. The report included a National Agenda to Protect Children's Health from Environmental Threats, which called for a national commitment to ensure a healthy future for our children. Externally, a Presidential Executive Order, 13045, was issued to ensure that this national effort had the support of Federal agencies throughout the government.

Strategy Highlights

Establish collaborative relationships with children's health stakeholders to leverage resources to conduct cross-media workshops, summits and conferences for health care providers. One aspect of this strategy will include building a relationship with NGO's, federal, state and local agencies.

Seek opportunities to network at conferences and workshops to identify organizations where there is a common interest and target audience: children (e.g., HHS Head Start, HRSA, and local state environment and health departments) in reducing environmental health risks to children.

When parents know better, they do better...utilize the H.E.L.P for Kids train-the-trainer model to increase children's, parents', and care-givers' awareness of how to identify, avoid, remove or prevent children's exposure to environmental hazards.

Conduct an in-reach campaign to regional programs to encourage them to actively engage in collaborations with other media programs in implementing projects or activities to reduce environmental health risks to children.

FY 2004 Goals

- Sponsor two children's environmental health conferences and workshops in areas of high need (Houston and the Rio Grande Valley).
- Sign an MOA with HHS that links their Head Start program with Children's Health.

Regional Energy Strategy

The Energy Challenge
America's energy challenge is based on a growing economy, an expanding population, and a rising standard of living. The nation's economy is tied to its energy supply and usage. The United States faces a number of inter-related and inter-dependent facets: Using energy more wisely; Modernizing our energy infrastructure; and Increasing energy supplies while protecting the environment. America's citizens, now and future generations, desire and need an energy supply that is safe, reliable, environmentally sound, and reasonable.

Conservation and Energy Efficiency
Over the past three decades, America has made impressive gains in energy efficiency. Today's automobiles use about 60% of the gasoline they used in 1972. While the U.S. economy has expanded by 126% since 1973, energy use has only increased by 30%. Conservation will provide benefits through an easing of the burden on the need to development new energy production, lessen pollution impacts, and reduce energy costs to consumers. Conservation and efficiency programs allow free market principles to change consumer behavior and foster environmental improvements.

Two energy efficiency programs, Energy Star appliances and Energy Star Home Construction, have and will contribute tremendously to a Modern Conservation ethic. In 2002, Energy Star programs helped save enough energy to power 10 million homes and reduced air pollution the equivalent of taking 10 million cars off the road. In May, 2001, Frisco, TX, became the first city in the United States to require that new homes be constructed at least 30% more efficient than the International Energy Conservation Code. Through conservation, the average homeowner in Frisco will save over $425 a year in energy bills.

Energy Infrastructure
Much of America's energy infrastructure, power plants and refineries, transmission grids and distribution pipelines is operating at near capacity and consists of components designed and constructed in the mid 20th century. A single break in a gasoline pipeline, even if remediated quickly, can cause localized shortages and price hikes. In August 2003, tens of millions of Americans and Canadians suffered an electrical blackout due to a breakdown in a transmission corridor. Energy resources, either as raw input materials or as refined supplies, are not always located in areas of greatest need or utility. Getting energy from the field to the end consumers is a logistical challenge.

One hindrance to resolving the challenges to the nation's infrastructure is a system of complex, and at times conflicting, regulatory structures. In the last 2 years, EPA Region 6 has been an active participant in multi-agency meetings, task forces, and work groups designed to facilitate decision-making on permit applications. EPA was a participant in the Council on Environmental Quality's work group that developed a multi-agency Memorandum of Understanding to foster natural gas pipeline permit decisions. With passage of the amendments of the Deepwater Port Act in November 2002 to allow importation of liquidified natural gas to offshore terminals for re-gasification, Region 6 has been the focus for the construction of these LNG terminals in the Gulf of Mexico, which will utilize the network of natural gas pipelines that already exist off the coasts of Louisiana and Texas. Three corporations have applied for Deepwater Port Act licenses from the Coast Guard / Maritime Administration and will need to obtain Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act permits as well from Region 6. Another three corporations are working on their DPA applications. In a pilot program to enhance state and federal cooperation to locate pipeline and transmission corridors as well as exploration for mineral resources on state and federal property, Region 6 participates in the Rocky Mountain Energy Council. The RMEC consists of state and federal agencies that serve as energy or environmental stewards in the states of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico, Utah and Wyoming.

Increase Energy Supplies

One aspect of the current energy dilemma is an increased dependence, not only on foreign oil, but on a narrow range of energy options. In 2000, coal and nuclear energy accounted for over 70% of the U.S. electricity generation. While 90% of new generation plants under construction will be fired by natural gas, the U.S. known natural gas supplies are limited and we could become dependent on imports and vulnerable to price hikes and distribution disruptions. Renewable and alternative sources of energy made up only 2% of the 2000 energy portfolio.

Region 6, in 2003, created a multi-division Waste-to-Energy Task Force to examine regulatory and procedural barriers to the development of energy from materials traditionally considered waste streams. The Task Force is concentrating on solid waste landfills, publicly operated treatment works, and concentrated animal feeding operations. Harnessing these sources of energy inputs will reduce operational costs to the owners and put to productive use the waste materials.

Other alternative sources of energy to be examined include wind farms, hydroelectric from water treatment plant discharges, biomass from agriculture and forestry facilities, and advancement in fuel cell development.

Improved technology in exploration and production can make new sources of more traditional energy supplies (petroleum, natural gas, coal bed methane and coal) in a more environmentally protective manner. An integrated approach to energy development can yield a cleaner environment, a stronger economy, and a sufficient supply of energy sources for the future.

Tribes support the promotion of alternative forms of energy, fuels, and transportation.

Future Directions

Environmental work associated with energy extraction, development, production, transmission, and storage are expected to increase. Major areas of impact and effect of these activity increases are in the NEPA, Air, and Water programs with regard to fast tracking review, consultation, and in appropriate cases, approval of energy related projects. Major upswings in regulatory review and approval are expected in work associated with a significant increase in the number of planned conventional/unconventional hydrocarbon extraction wells and waste-water disposal, planned coal and natural gas fired power plants, and in the opening of federal lands to development involving NEPA and other regulatory processes. Natural gas distribution and transmission projects are also being planned which command attention and resource.

Energy conservation projects and the promotion of renewable energy portfolios across the nation would produce immediate results and are consistent with the National Energy Policy, which promotes sustainable energy independence. Conservation and renewable energy investments would reduce waste, reduce the dependency on foreign sources of energy and make a strong investment in the Nation's future. While the Region has invested in these areas, significant opportunities continue to exist where EPA could lead or partner with various organizations to maximize energy conservation and alternative energy development. Areas of investment include: feasibility assessments and demonstration projects for wind, solar, biomass, geo-thermal, and hydrogen energy projects, landfill gas-to-energy projects, and reflective roof and vegetation retrofits for energy reductions. These investments would augment the current work being conducted in Energy Star/Conservation, Green Power Partnership, in carbon sequestration projects and which are consistent with pollution prevention projects.

FY 2004 Goals

- Promote the link between energy conservation and environmental improvement by hosting 4 conferences [2 focused on air quality improvements through energy efficiency in Dallas and Houston for municipalities, and one for EPA national air innovations; one to address Waste-to-Energy opportunities for

the Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations industry]

- Improve relationships with the regulated industry by: developing an MOA with the EPA Region 6 state oil & gas regulatory agencies based on the IOGCC MOU model; and hosting 2 semi-annual meetings with the state oil & gas regulatory agencies

- Issue, as appropriate, CAA and CWA permits for 2 liquified natural gas terminals in the Gulf of Mexico under the Deepwater Port Act

Region 6 Agriculture Sector Strategic Plan

Current Condition

More than 232 million acres of the 900 million acres devoted to agriculture in the United States are in Region 6. Collectively, Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas produce more than twenty-seven billion dollars worth of food and fiber each year. The state by state statistics from recent years are: Arkansas: 14.4 million acres producing 5.5 billion dollars; Louisiana: 7.88 million acres, 2 billion dollars; New Mexico: 45.8 million acres, 1.6 billion dollars; Oklahoma: 33.2 million acres, 4.1 billion dollars; and Texas: 131 million acres, 13.8 billion dollars.

Agriculture in Region 6 contributes significantly to the local, state and national economies but it can and does in certain circumstances cause harm to the environment. More and more ground water is becoming contaminated with agricultural chemicals; surface water quality is being impacted by sediments, pesticides, fertilizers, and animal wastes that run off pastures and crop land; wildlife habitat is either altered or destroyed; and air is polluted by particulate matter blown from fields or gaseous releases coming from animal wastes. Many of these deleterious effects are derived from the fact that many agricultural operations are becoming larger and more concentrated.

The above scenario of problems arising from concentrated agricultural practices is exemplified for surface water runoff issues in three areas of Region 6. These areas are: the North Bosque River Watershed; the Illinois River water bordering Oklahoma and Arkansas; and the Gulf of Mexico hypoxia zone. In the first two areas, phosphorus is the contaminant of concern, and animal wastes generated from concentrated animal feeding operations appear to be the major contributors. However, in the case of the Bosque River Watershed, dairy farms are almost exclusively the issue. With respect to the Illinois River, poultry litter, along with certain municipalities, appear to be the primary sources. The Gulf of Mexico hypoxia zone is caused, in large part, by excessive nutrient loading from the Mississippi and Atchafalaya River basins. The primary nutrient sources include agricultural and municipal point sources, urban non-point source runoff, and atmospheric deposition.

In Region 6, we have formed an Agriculture Committee consisting of staff and managers and chaired by a full-time senior agricultural advisor to systematically address all agricultural concerns. Although these committee members are located in various divisions, routine meetings of the committee and continued close collaboration between members ensures that agricultural issues are addressed in a holistic manner. **The State of Louisiana has a Master Farmer Program that is designed to demonstrate that agricultural producers can and will voluntarily reduce the impact that they have on the bayous, rivers and lakes within Louisiana, if they are given sufficient information, technical and financial support and time. Tribes believe that it is important to regulate genetically engineered crops.**

Strategic Plans

This strategic plan identifies specific environmental concerns and priorities related to agriculture to be addressed by EPA Region 6 over the next three to five years. The Plan also provides a common set of policies and principles for integrating program work across the agricultural sector. It defines the role of the EPA Region 6 Agriculture Committee and the Senior Agricultural Advisor.

- We will continue to concentrate many of our resources (personnel and funding) to those geographical areas that are most impacted by agricultural

activities. As mentioned above, there are presently three areas which are receiving a considerable amount of the Region's attention and resources. It is our intention in the future to continue to pursue this avenue. We believe that, by concentrating a significant amount of our resources on these large areas that have significant environmental impacts, we can get significant environmental improvement with moderate investment. The alternative would be to spread our resources over a broad gamut of agricultural activities. However, we believe this would lead to less environmental improvement because there would be less leveraging of resources and collaboration with our federal and state partners.

Highlights

- Bosque River Watershed and Illinois River - We will work with the State Agricultural Agencies and NRCS to explore best management practices to reduce phosphorus loadings into the respective rivers.

- Gulf of Mexico Hypoxia Zone - The Region will continue its efforts to work with the State of Louisiana and all the other states up river to implement corrective action measures so as to reduce nutrient and sediment loadings into the Mississippi.

- Region 6 will continue to use a sector approach to address environmental problems related to agriculture. By "sector approach" we mean agriculture as a sector of society, or as an economic system, that may involve a variety of EPA programs. This means any environmental issue relating to agriculture will be dealt with an understanding of its relationship to all EPA programs. For example, efforts to reduce sediment in water will consider the potential impacts of such actions on efforts to reduce particulate matter in the air, to promote sensible pest management, to preserve habitat, to protect ground water quality, and on any of the many other environmental programs for which EPA has responsibility. In short, we will attempt to view these concerns as a farmer might see them, and be aware of how one issue connects to another.

  Highlights

  - Ag Committee Strengthened - Not only will the Regional Ag committee continue to exist, it will be strengthened by being formally recognized by senior management as the primary workgroup to address all Ag activities. It will be chaired by the Ag advisor and the committee will meet at least once a month.

- We will collaborate with other federal, state, tribal and local government agencies to leverage resources and better administer agricultural related programs. We will integrate our programs with those of other agencies, so that the agricultural community sees a consistent set of requirements and mandates. In the past, conflict and inconsistency between agencies have been a major impediment to agriculture's application of positive environmental practices.

  Highlights

  -Watershed Planning- Region 6 will work with USDA/NRCS and the State Agriculture Agencies, to develop a watershed plan/strategy in at least one watershed per year.

  - State Meetings - We will meet at least once a year with one State to continue dialogue begun at the Regional Agriculture Dialogue meeting in September 2002, in Arlington, on state specific environmental issues.

  -Agricultural Liaison Positions - The Region will support at least one state agency liaison position to be located within the Regional office and help the Region in its outreach activities. The liaison will be from the Agricultural Extension Service and will be located in our Pesticides program.

  - Agricultural BMPs and Drinking Water Sources - To add additional protection to the public drinking water supply we will help States

manage agricultural runoff through Best Management Practices. Adverse agricultural practices pose a potential risk to sources of drinking water are a key component of each state's source water protection program

- We will integrate our traditional regulatory and enforcement approaches with expanded technical assistance and incentives.

  Highlights
  - Grant Utilization for Compliance Assistance - We will use a headquarters grant to assist CAFOs in compliance assistance with regards to complying with the new CAFO general permit requirements.

- We will build partnerships with the agricultural community which foster proactive, innovative, community-based, and common sense approaches to environmental protection and land conservation.

  Highlights
  - Conduct Ag Industry Meetings -The next year we will work with the State Agricultural agencies and NRCS in hosting listening forums with Ag industry representatives. The meetings will be conducted to listen to the industries' concerns and issues to resolve problems dealing with compliance of environmental regulations. The states and the respective Ag group representatives will be queried before a decision is made to conduct the forum to see if there is adequate interest.

  - Senior Management Meetings with Ag Commodity Representatives - On an as-requested basis, senior management in Region 6 will continue to avail themselves to meet with a group of Ag commodities group representatives for the purpose of discussing pertinent issues. We will meet with the group at least twice a year.

  - Agricultural Website - The Ag committee will develop and maintain a regional agricultural website that will serve to inform the agricultural community regarding pertinent EPA activities and allow them to ask questions of us via e-mail.

  - Attend Ag Community Conventions and Conferences - To the degree that travel funds will allow, the Ag Advisor or representatives of the Ag Committee will attend at least half a dozen of these types of agricultural functions in any given year to network and give presentations. In this regard also, the Ag committee will develop an Ag display that can be exhibited at the representative conferences and conventions.

  - Field Tours and Demonstrations - Whenever feasible, we will coordinate with Ag industry reps to conduct tours of agricultural operations. We will attempt to do at least two of these a year. We will do at least two of these a year.

Strategic Management of Human Capital

Background
The President's Management Agenda has put new emphasis on the Federal government's most valuable resource, the employees, by listing the *Strategic Management of Human Capital* as an initiative with which Agencies are charged to "Get to Green." The development of a highly skilled and motivated workforce does not happen by accident. Agencies must plan for utilization of this most valuable resource through the development of a Human Capital Strategic Plan. EPA Region 6 is committed to supporting EPA Headquarters in this Agency initiative.

Current Condition
The Region 6 Human Capital Strategic Plan is under development. The plan seeks to ensure the Agency workforce is strategically aligned and well-prepared to attain our goals and objectives for clean air, clean and safe water, preserving and restoring the land, healthy communities and ecosystems, and compliance and environmental stewardship. The plan will support and complement the Agency's Human Capital Strategy as it provides an overview of EPA Region 6's human capital environment and recent activities. It will be comprised of interdependent action strategies and improvements goals, e.g., the Recruitment Plan and the People Plan, that establish our Regional efforts in responding proactively to our human capital challenges.

Workforce Planning efforts are currently underway in order to maximize opportunities for organizational improvements brought about by departure of staff through retirements and resignations. Reorganizations to more meaningful, efficient structures will better align functions with organizational needs and missions. Studies to determine loss of talent are enabling Region 6 to form a more viable Recruitment Plan.

Planned Strategies to Improve the Program
- Build a partnership between our Senior Managers and the Human Resources Office for greater managerial involvement in Human Capital Planning.
- Continue to seek close alignment of the Human Capital Plan to the Region 6 Strategic Plan.
- Develop a region-wide accountability system to ensure that Region 6 is doing its part to help the Agency "Get to Green" in achieving the President's Management Agenda.
- Endorse workforce planning as the means of reviewing FTE usage, determining vacancies, and identifying opportunities for creative hiring and staffing, including external appointments.
- Through a variety of recruitment avenues, attract and retain a talented, skilled, and diverse workforce with the necessary abilities and proficiencies to accomplish the Region's mission and strategic goals.
- Expand on workforce development initiatives, including executive coaching, continued emphasis on training for new supervisors, and training partnerships with other agencies, e.g, the Immigration and Naturalization Service Leadership Development Center in Dallas, Texas.

Long Term Strategic Goals
- Ensure leadership continuity and development through succession planning, supported by workforce analyses and optimal use of available executive training resources.
- Align the performance appraisal system more closely with the Agency's mission and with employee development and recognition programs, ultimately improving individual and organizational performance.

- Foster Region 6 employee creativity and innovation through new recognition approaches and processes which reward inventive management and environmental problem-solving.

- Cultivate an increased atmosphere of human capital value through more communication between managers and supervisors and human resource consultants.

FY 2004 Goals

- Finalize and implement the Region 6 Human Capital Strategic Plan.

- Direct workforce planning efforts to positions vacated through the Agency's early-out/buy-out incentive to ensure cost neutrality if/when positions are filled.

Point of Contact: Richard Martinez, Human Resources Officer, (214) 665-6563

Homeland Security

Regional Strategy

The Homeland Security program within EPA began with the publication of Presidential Decision Directive 63. Under this Directive, EPA was given responsibility for security of the nation's drinking water systems. In addition, under Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Federal Response Plan, EPA has been assigned the lead for support functions relative to hazardous material emergencies.

Region 6 played an active role in recovery from the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center incident. We also served as the lead Agency in the recovery efforts associated with the Space Shuttle Columbia tragedy. Since Region 6 will have major responsibilities in responding to any incident of national significance, our goal is to ensure that our employees are fully equipped and trained to respond to a broad range of emergencies.

Region 6's Homeland Security Strategy will focus on the following activities to improve response and enhance water security.

- Coordination between the media programs on Homeland Security issues occurs at the Regional Incident Coordination Team (RICT) meetings that are held weekly. Several efforts are currently underway as a result of our weekly RICT meetings. We expect other initiatives and efforts will come from the RICT over the next five years. Previously, the RICT developed the Response Support Corp and determined the need to develop procedures for building evacuation and COOP improvements. These efforts are at various stages of implementation or development. We expect some of these initiatives to be further enhanced over the next few years.

- In addition to the RICT, Region 6 has been focusing on its COOP and determining when building evacuation would occur. We have developed planned responses to four "what if" scenarios regarding COOP activation. We expect to further enhance this over the next few years as we go forward in enhancing our COOP facility. One area of concern to the Region is the ability to access software should the COOP be activated. A major effort over the next few years will focus on key software and maintaining the critical needs data base. We will also continue testing the COOP.

- EPA operates a nationwide environmental radiation monitoring program that provides information about the wide-scale spread of radioactive material from nuclear or radiological incidents. The Agency has plans to expand this network over the next five years such that data from the National Monitoring System can be utilized for making protective-action decisions in the event of a major nuclear or radiological incident. The expanded National Monitoring System will increase reliability and population coverage. Region 6 will implement the goal of increasing the number of monitors or area coverage from 37% to 70% by 2006.

- EPA plays a key role in crisis and consequence management responsibilities under the Federal Response Plan. The Region remains committed to homeland security and will take a proactive approach in preparing for potential or emerging terrorist threats. Our goal in Region 6 is to have adequate trained staff to respond to simultaneous emergencies. With a limited number of On-Scene Coordinators (OSCs) and the potential of simultaneous emergencies, Region 6 will continue to develop the capabilities of the Response Support Corp (RSC). In FY02, Region 6 developed the RSC (non-OSC staff) concept and developed a list of 40 RSC volunteers that were field trained and familiar with the Incident Command Structure. After the Columbia Shuttle incident, we realized the need to expand the RSC to include more field trained individuals and to include staff with various management skills. Over the next five years, we plan to complete the RSC training and increase the number of non-OSC employees that can provide support in the field and back in the office for emergencies.

- Region 6 has developed a counter-terrorism team (CT) consisting of eight OSCs and three Senior Environmental Employees. We will enhance training by having two OSCs trained with expertise in chemical responses, two OSCs trained with expertise in biological responses, and two OSCs trained with expertise in nuclear responses. Region 6 OSCs will participate in national workgroups focusing on development of EPA's national CT program. The Region continues to work on improving its capability to respond effectively to incidents that may involve harmful chemical, biological, and radiological substances. Over the next five years, we will continue to work with our Regional Response Team, Local Environmental Planning Committees, and other federal, state, and local agencies in conducting emergency exercises to improve our responses

- Region 6 is working to ensure the safety of critical water infrastructure in the event of terrorist or other intentional acts. We are working with local drinking water and wastewater utilities to assess their vulnerability to terrorist or other intentional acts and to develop or revise their emergency response plans. For drinking water systems, these efforts were reinforced by Congress, which required community water systems supplying water to more than 3,300 people to conduct vulnerability assessments and prepare emergency response plans. Our final congressional deadline is December 31, 2004. Wastewater systems have also been conducting the full range of activities related to vulnerability assessments and emergency response plans. Since this is not a “one time only” endeavor, we will continue to provide the full menu of technical assistance and training approaches to ensure that systems are identifying their vulnerabilities and developing robust emergency response plans.

- Contingency Plans for the 14 U.S.-Mexico Sister Cities will also significantly enhance the effectiveness of municipal authorities to cooperate in responding to potentially disastrous incidents. Scientific and technical analyses, especially on methods and technologies, will improve the overall capacity to protect drinking water and wastewater utilities. The Region will spearhead and support efforts under the national goals to develop effective and affordable methods, technologies, equipment, and other tools needed to protect drinking water and wastewater systems from attack. Another major activity that the Region will be undertaking over the next few years is working with Hospitals along the U.S./Mexico border such that they are better incorporated into the Sister City plans as well as emergency response planning.

- The Houston Laboratory will be working with the State and Local laboratories to set up a protected web-site for laboratories to exchange information on the analysis of various constituents including WMD. It is the goal of the Houston Laboratory to get this web-site operational in FY04.

- In FY2004, Region 6 will work with local Emergency Planning Committees to conduct 20 exercises.

FY 2004 Goals

- Ensure compliance with the Bioterrorism Act for facilities of 50K to 100K in completion of their vulnerability assessments and emergency plans. 100% is the goal.

- Ensure compliance with the Bioterrorism Act for facilities of 3300 to 50K in completion of their vulnerability assessments - 80% is the goal.

Innovating for Better Environmental Results: Region 6 Innovation Strategy

Background
In April 2001, EPA's Innovation Action Council developed a range of ideas and recommendations that served as the basis for the Agency's Innovation Strategy. The strategy, the Region espouses flows from the National strategy and builds on experiences gained in voluntary and regulatory flexibility programs to date, links innovation to priority environmental priorities, and places particular emphasis on strong partnerships with States.

Environmental protection is an increasingly complex endeavor. Many organizations other than EPA – State, Local and Tribal governments, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and communities – now play influential roles in setting environmental priorities and deciding how to manage them. The range of available tools – environmental management systems, information, new technologies, economic incentives – continues to expand and they're achieving impressive results at a lower cost. Environmental goals are evolving from pollution control to solutions based on pollution prevention, industrial ecology, and stewardship and there is widespread agreement that conventional regulatory approaches alone will not sustain continued environmental improvement.

A new and improved system would enable more comprehensive environmental management by using more tailored, integrated strategies for facilities, sectors, and communities. It would routinely use incentives to foster environmental stewardship and harness the power of new information technology to improve public access to information and streamline environmental reporting. It would also be more performance-based, requiring strong accountability for results while increasing flexibility for achieving them.

Current Condition
Over the past decade, EPA has been working towards such a system, providing leadership for environmental innovation among Federal agencies. But the result has been a disparate array of projects and pilots that aren't necessarily designed to achieve system-wide improvement. A revitalized strategy must build on past innovation efforts while addressing their shortcomings, including the lack of strategic focus on priority environmental problems, high transaction costs, and an inconsistent system for incorporating successful approaches into broader change. Our challenge is to test new strategies while continuing to operate conventional environmental programs, dovetailing where possible and consistently striving for alignment. We must adapt to new roles beyond the traditional ones of regulator and enforcer. We will need to be an innovator, a catalyst for change, and a ready partner with others.

Planned Strategies to Improve Innovations
EPA's Innovation Strategy has been designed to:

- Strengthen the State-EPA partnership on environmental innovation;
- Focus innovation efforts on addressing priority environmental problems;
- Continue to diversify approaches and tools available for environmental problem-solving;
- Create a culture and organizational systems that support innovation and ensure lasting change.

EPA's Innovation Strategy identified specific environmental challenges as targets of opportunity for innovation, **greenhouse gases, water quality, water infrastructure and smog** – as the primary focus. Although not an exclusive list, these areas are EPA's top priorities for innovation.

While shifting the primary focus to environmental problems, EPA's innovation strategy must also assure the continuing development of new tools and approaches available for problem solving, such as market trading for some and strict discharge limits for others; voluntary and regulatory programs; integrated compliance strategies that use a combination of compliance assistance, incentives and enforcement; multi-media approaches, information-based campaigns; and tailored approaches for small businesses and others. We will rely less on end-of-pipe technology requirements and more on whole-facility environmental management with a strong emphasis on accountability for meeting specific performance requirements.

EPA must continue to add to the environmental protection tool kit and encourage creative combination of traditional and new approaches, working with States, EPA can provide leadership in moving new tools and approaches.

As EPA develops new tools and approaches, it will build upon a broad base of innovative activities that already exist - an accumulation of many years and much hard work. There are large multi-media "flagship" programs such as National Environmental Performance Track, Smart Growth, and the National Environmental Performance Partnership Program. Other significant voluntary programs include Brownfields, Energy Star, High Production Volume testing program for chemicals, Design for the Environment, and Compliance Assistance Centers. Still others support State initiatives such as the State Innovation Grants competition and projects included in the EPA/State innovations agreement. EPA's Innovation Action Council has developed a catalog of major innovation programs and projects that will help EPA, States, and Tribes tap into ongoing efforts and share ideas that may be transferrable.

Over time, EPA, including Region 6 will need to align the various innovation programs with the vision of an improved system of environmental protection and reduce their number to a more manageable set. In the short term, EPA should concentrate new activity in these programs to drive innovation to address the priority issues identified above. Region 6 provides critical support for the above high-profile programs.

Long Term Strategic Goals

Changing how EPA approaches environmental problem-solving poses significant management challenges. Recent experience at EPA, as well as from other Federal and State agencies, underscores the need for a well planned and managed approach to the innovation process. The conclusion of the Innovation Action Council, with support from several State environmental commissioners, is that the next round of innovation at EPA should place greater priority on ensuring that the EPA systems of management, decision making, and budget support innovation, as well as integrating a spirit of innovation into the attitudes and culture of the people who work at the Agency.

The Region 6 believes a system should value ideas from within the organization, as well as from parties outside EPA. The Region is seeking a robust system that seeks out new ideas and fosters a belief that ideas from all parties will receive a fair and thorough review and chance for implementation. On the organizational level we want to show individual staff members that they can make a difference.

FY 2004 Goals

- Complete Region 6 Innovation Strategy
- Implement one (1) alternative approach innovation pilot project in partnership with a State agency
- Maintain a 25% annual increase in membership in the Performance Track program.