



Highlights of [GAO-08-304](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Established in 1971, the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) library network provides staff and the public with access to environmental information. Its 26 libraries contain a wide range of information and resources and are located at headquarters, regional offices, research centers, and laboratories nationwide. In 2006, EPA issued a plan to reorganize the network beginning in fiscal year 2007. The plan proposed closing libraries and dispersing, disposing of, and digitizing library materials.

GAO was asked to assess (1) the status of, and plans for, the network reorganization; (2) EPA's rationale for reorganizing the network; (3) the extent to which EPA has communicated with and solicited the views of EPA staff and external stakeholders in conducting the reorganization; (4) EPA's steps to maintain the quality of library services after the reorganization; and (5) how EPA is funding the network and its reorganization. For this study, GAO reviewed pertinent EPA documents and interviewed EPA officials and staff from each of the libraries.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that EPA continue its moratorium until it takes corrective actions to (1) justify its decision to reorganize the network, (2) improve its outreach efforts, (3) ensure sufficient oversight and monitoring of the reorganization, and (4) implement procedures for the proper dispersal and disposal of library materials. EPA agreed with GAO's recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-304](#). For more information, contact John B. Stephenson at (202) 512-3841 or stephensonj@gao.gov.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

EPA Needs to Ensure That Best Practices and Procedures Are Followed When Making Further Changes to Its Library Network

What GAO Found

Since 2006, EPA has implemented its reorganization plan to close physical access to 4 libraries. In the same period, 6 other libraries in the network decided to change their operations, while 16 have not changed. Some of these libraries have also digitized, dispersed, or disposed of their materials. Since the reorganization, EPA has begun drafting a common set of agencywide library procedures and has hired a program manager for the network. While these procedures are under development, however, EPA has imposed a moratorium on further changes to the network in response to congressional and other expressions of concern.

EPA's primary rationale for the library network reorganization was to generate cost savings by creating a more coordinated library network and increasing the electronic delivery of services. However, EPA did not fully follow procedures recommended in a 2004 EPA study of steps that should be taken to prepare for a reorganization. In particular, EPA did not fully evaluate alternative models, and associated costs and benefits, of library services. EPA officials stated that they needed to act quickly to reorganize the library network in response to a proposed fiscal year 2007 funding reduction.

EPA did not develop procedures to inform staff and the public on the final configuration of the library network, and EPA libraries varied considerably and were limited in the extent to which they communicated with and solicited views from stakeholders before and during the reorganization effort. In particular, EPA's plan did not include information that the Chemical Library was to close, and EPA did not inform staff or the public until after the fact. EPA's communication procedures were limited or inconsistent because EPA acted quickly to make changes in response to a proposed fiscal year 2007 funding reduction, and because of the decentralized nature of the library network. EPA is currently increasing its communication efforts.

EPA does not have a post-reorganization strategy to ensure the continuity of library services and has not yet determined the full effect of the reorganization on library services. Moreover, EPA has recently made several changes that could have impaired user access to library materials and services. For example, EPA did not determine whether federal property management regulations applied to the dispersal and disposal of library materials before it closed the libraries. Furthermore, EPA lacked oversight of the reorganization process and does not have procedures that would allow the agency to measure performance and monitor user needs.

Several different EPA offices are responsible for the libraries in the network. Each office generally decides how much funding to allocate to the libraries for which it is responsible and how to fund their reorganization. However, when faced with a proposed budget reduction of \$2 million in fiscal year 2007, EPA specifically directed that these offices reduce funding for their libraries and did not specify how to achieve the reduction. Additional funds were not allocated to assist offices in closing their libraries.