

**STATEMENT OF
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POLICY, INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS AND THE CENSUS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chairman Putnam, and Members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate this opportunity to discuss with you “*Electronic Government: A Progress Report on the Successes and Challenges of Government-wide Information Technology Solutions.*” I will speak briefly on EPA’s groundbreaking use of information technology to achieve our Agency’s mission of protecting human health and the environment, and then devote most of my testimony to the E-Government initiatives raised by the Subcommittee, focusing primarily on eRulemaking, the initiative for which EPA serves as the government-wide lead.

WHAT E-GOVERNMENT MEANS TO EPA

EPA recognizes that rapid, sweeping, and profound information technology advances offer substantial opportunities to conduct business differently. Through electronic government innovations and mechanisms, EPA can work more quickly, effectively, and at a lower cost to meet the public’s expectations for improved environmental and health protection. For example, in partnership with states, EPA is developing a national environmental information exchange network that will revolutionize the way information is sent to, and received by, EPA and its partners. Another example of an innovative solution to meet the public’s expectations is the

Window to My Environment software. Through this software EPA has used information technology to provide a geographic portal to community-based environmental information.

For the hearing today, the Subcommittee has focused on the President's Management Agenda E-Government Initiatives. EPA participates in 14 of the 25 E-Government initiatives, including all 6 specifically covered by today's hearing. To ensure that we actively and constructively help these projects achieve their goals, I have established a function within my office that coordinates work across the Agency. This management function is one of the important lessons we have learned about ensuring the success of interagency efforts. Because EPA serves as the government-wide lead on the eRulemaking initiative, I will devote the remainder of my testimony to this initiative.

eRULEMAKING

EPA is proud to serve as the government-wide lead partner for the eRulemaking initiative, recognizing the critically important role citizens play in the rulemaking process. The eRulemaking initiative will help overcome barriers to public participation in the federal regulatory process by improving the public's ability to find, view, understand, and comment on regulatory actions.

Progress to Date

The eRulemaking initiative comprises 3 modules that will improve Agency processes, enhance public participation, and yield more timely regulatory decisions.

Module 1 is a federal regulatory clearinghouse Web site, *Regulations.gov*, that was officially launched in January 2003. It is a one-stop Web site that allows citizens to search, find, view, and comment on all ongoing rulemakings published by federal agencies. *Regulations.gov*

is the direct result of a collaborative effort by 5 federal agencies. In just 3 months and for less than \$300,000 the *Regulations.gov* Web site was designed, tested and launched. Since its launch in January 2003, this Web site has received more than 2,500,000 hits, with an average of 6,000 hits per day and a tripling of page downloads to 15,000 per month.

Module 2 of the eRulemaking initiative will build upon *Regulations.gov* to establish a full-featured Federal Docket Management System. Currently in development, this federal government-wide docket system will serve as a central repository for published rulemaking documents and all supporting materials, enabling the public to easily search, access, and comment on all publicly available regulatory materials. The Federal Docket Management System workgroup expects to complete the requirements for this module by the end of April and agency testing will begin in September. It will be based upon commercial, off-the-shelf technology configured for online docket management and state of the art security.

Module 3 of the eRulemaking initiative will help develop information technology tools that agencies can adopt to help their rule writers develop, review, and publish federal regulations. Using best practices from across all agencies, this module will provide a variety of tools, such as online training for rule writing, public comment analysis software, and electronic transmission of documents. While agency participation in this module is voluntary, participants from 13 federal agencies attended a Module 3 workshop in November 2003 to launch the effort.

Success Factors

The success of the eRulemaking initiative to date is based on a number of factors. First, collaboration of all involved partners has been essential. We recognize that rulemaking is a major core business process for many federal agencies and involves a stakeholder community

comprised of regulated businesses, concerned citizens, academic researchers, and public and private interest groups. This large number of stakeholders poses a significant management challenge, but one we cannot ignore.

Second, the committed involvement of Chief Information Officers and senior rulemaking officials from participating agencies has been critical. Working through an Executive Steering Committee, these individuals have been essential in defining the scope and functionality of the Federal Docket Management System and in a recent 15-2 vote, they endorsed a centralized architecture for this system. This type of cross-agency collaboration and input in the formulation and strategy of this initiative has played a critical role in this initiative's success to date.

Continuing Challenges

Through collaboration and a strong commitment to reaping the benefits inherent in electronic government, the eRulemaking initiative has made significant strides toward a more efficient, integrated, publicly accessible approach to the regulatory process. The interagency team has received a number of awards for its success so far, including an Innovation Award from the National Association of Secretaries of State, a Federal Executive Leadership Council Award, and a Grace Hopper Government Technology Leadership Award.

Nonetheless, we face a number of hurdles to ensure that the eRulemaking initiative continues to be successful. First, creating a federal government-wide docket system for the federal agencies with rulemaking authority poses a significant organizational management challenge. In addition, organizational changes necessitated by migration to one centralized rulemaking system will undoubtedly present a whole new set of issues.

Finally, effective communication has been key to the successful implementation of a

cross-agency initiative of this nature. We need to do more. Over the coming months we will focus on increasing public awareness of *Regulations.gov* and steering new business to the site. On March 1, 2004, OMB sent a memo to the President's Management Council in an effort to improve agency awareness of *Regulations.gov*. OMB directed agencies to include a link to www.regulations.gov from their homepage making it easier for citizens to find, view, and submit feedback on all federal rules open for comment. In addition, OMB directed agencies to cite the URL for *Regulations.gov* in their Federal Register rule notices to ensure that citizens are aware of an online method in which they can submit comments. Ultimately, these actions enhance citizen access to and participation in the rulemaking process. We will also strengthen our communication efforts with other federal agencies to help preclude unanticipated problems and work closely with interest groups and other non-governmental entities to seek out their ideas and fully understand their needs.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate EPA's strong commitment to the collaborative leadership of the eRulemaking initiative and the other E-Government projects discussed today, and more broadly, to IT solutions as a means to substantially enhance our Agency's ability to achieve its mission of ensuring that all Americans enjoy a safe and healthy environment.

Thank you, Chairman Putnam, and Members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to appear today. I would be glad to respond to any questions that you may have.

Regulations.gov opening screen

