

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****May 16, 2001****EPA PETITIONED TO IMPROVE HOW IT  
PUBLISHES INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET**

This week the Washington Legal Foundation (WLF) filed a petition with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), urging it to adopt several changes in how it presents environmental information on the Internet.

WLF filed its petition out of a concern that the EPA too often uses the public release of information as a highly questionable form of regulation. When a facility, such as a car manufacturer, reports that it has released a certain amount of a regulated chemical, the EPA posts that information on the Internet, at least in part, for the purpose of pressuring the manufacturer into reducing its chemical emissions below the levels required by law. WLF's petition is squarely aimed at curbing this illegitimate regulatory practice.

The EPA publishes a variety of information over the Internet. Particular sites include the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) and the TRI Explorer; the Sector Facility Indexing Project (SFIP); Environmental Monitoring for Public Access and Community Tracking (EMPACT); Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS); and the Envirofacts Warehouse. These websites publish environmental information in differing formats, using different analytical approaches, and evidently serving differing purposes. SFIP tracks toxic chemical releases by industrial sector. TRI and TRI Explorer publish data regarding toxic chemical releases; SFIP tracks such releases by industrial sector. EMPACT presents environmental information in real time. IRIS describes the human health risks of exposure to approximately 500 chemicals. The Envirofacts Warehouse supplies the Agency's answer to a desire for "one-stop shopping" for environmental information contained in the EPA's databases.

These Internet sites are purportedly designed to advance Goal 7 of the EPA Strategic Plan, "Expansion of Americans' Right to Know About Their Environment":

Easy access to a wealth of information about the state of their local environment will expand citizen involvement and give people tools to protect their families and their communities as they see fit. Increased information exchange between scientists, public health officials, businesses, citizens, and

all levels of government will foster greater knowledge about the environment and what can be done to protect it.

In its petition filed with the EPA, WLF urged the Agency to adopt recommendations intended to improve the objectivity and accuracy of the information posted on the Internet. Such recommendations include:

- Prohibiting the release of data that is not expressly authorized for publication by statute;
- Requiring the EPA to note in its disclosures whether particular activities are authorized by law, regulation, or permit;
- Requiring the EPA to explain the nature of each environmental violation and its impact or non-impact on the local community;
- Prohibiting the EPA from linking its Internet site with non-governmental third-party sites, or at least requiring it to include sites favorable to free enterprise alongside those that advocate environmental litigation;
- Prohibiting the release of trade secrets and confidential business information.

"The EPA ought to stop using information voluntarily turned over by lawfully-operated businesses as a public relations tool to coerce them into reducing their chemical emissions below levels required by law," said Shawn Gunnarson, WLF's Senior Counsel for Litigation Affairs. "We hope that the Agency will improve how it presents information over the Internet by adopting the recommendations we have proposed."

The Washington Legal Foundation is a public interest law and policy center with supporters in all fifty states. It devotes a significant portion of its resources to defending and promoting the principles of free enterprise and business civil liberties.

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