



# Society of Environmental Journalists

P. O. Box 2492, Jenkintown, PA 19046  
Phone: (215) 884-8174 Fax: (215) 884-8175  
Internet: [sej@sej.org](mailto:sej@sej.org) World Wide Web: <http://www.sej.org>  
Shipping address: 321 Old York Road, Suite 200, Jenkintown, PA 19046

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The Society of Environmental Journalists is writing to urge the full Senate to modify President Bush's proposed budget to reinstate funding that would maintain and improve the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's libraries.

The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ), with more than 1,450 members, is the world's largest and oldest organization of individual working journalists covering environmental issues. Among other things, SEJ keeps an eye on issues concerning freedom of information and the right-to-know, through its First Amendment Task Force and WatchDog Program.

Reducing funding for EPA's cultivated libraries is a step that closes the intellectual commons in this country. At a time when our political leaders are crying for improved scores in math and science from our students, and more advancements from our scientists, the proposed budget would eliminate \$2 million in funding for libraries relied on by ecologists, horticulturalists, conservation biologists, aqua culture specialists, environmental contractors cleaning up Superfund and brownfield sites, and a host of other scientists and researchers all who are using these libraries in part to find the most economical way to do their jobs. Taxpayers themselves want the biggest bang for their tax dollar.

Open access to information is a foundation of this country, and one the Society of Environmental Journalists strongly supports. Former Illinois Attorney General Neil Hartigan put it well when he said, "An open government is the only

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government that truly serves the public interest." We in SEJ support that notion.

From a financial perspective, cutting the EPA's library budget is not cost effective. A November 2005 cost-benefit analysis conducted by the agency concludes that shutting EPA's libraries actually will lead to a much larger financial burden for EPA than it already bears. Such an act is misguided, because it digs into the pockets and minds of everyone - those who use the libraries and those who don't. In "Business Case for Information Services: EPA Regional Libraries and Centers," agency researchers found that EPA's library network saved more than 214,000 hours of EPA staff time, at a cost savings of approximately \$7.5 million.

Proponents of the \$2 million budget cut - which would drop the EPA's library budget to \$500,000 from the current \$2.5 million - claim doing so will promote efficiency. We would like to see justification for that claim.

Proponents also have promised that electronic access to all of the information currently provided by the libraries will be made available and maintained online. We would like to see the plan and funding proposal backing up that promise.

To date, no line items have been written into the budget proposal that would pay for converting the nearly 67,000 paper-only documents of the agency's 80,000-document collection into electronic form. Further, no provisions for safeguarding the electronic form to assure it matches the original have been articulated.

We in SEJ cannot support reducing EPA's library budget because no provisions have been offered to account for what would become of all the books, reports, and photographs in the agency's libraries. Closing and dismantling the agency's network of technical research libraries, which would put thousands of scientific studies out of reach, has the potential to hinder emergency preparedness and anti-pollution enforcement and long-term research. Particularly at a time when the agency is beginning to discover the environmental impacts of pollution on public health, it is in the country's economic interest to fully fund EPA's libraries, and keep them open and prospering.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Perry Beeman". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Perry Beeman  
SEJ President