

EPA's RESPONSIBILITIES

Federal Small Business Ombudsman (EPA)

Established in 1982, the office of the Federal EPA Small Business Ombudsman serves as an effective conduit for small businesses to access the EPA and facilitates communications between the small business community and the Agency. The Office reviews and resolves disputes with EPA and works with EPA personnel to increase their understanding of small businesses in the development and enforcement of environmental regulations. The Office of Small Business Ombudsman is part of EPA's Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation.

The EPA SBO's primary customer group is the nation's small business community. Significant secondary customer groups include the state small business Ombudsmen, EPA regional Small Business Liaisons, and national trade associations serving small businesses. The EPA SBO's duties include:

- Overseeing and monitoring all state Small Business Environmental Assistance Programs to determine their progress, and how well the state programs are working;
- Rendering advisory opinions on the overall effectiveness of the State SBEAP's, difficulties encountered, and degree and severity of enforcement;
- Making periodic reports to Congress on compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act, the Regulatory Flexibility Act, and the Equal Access to Justice Act;
- Reviewing information issued by the State SBEAPs to ensure that it is understandable to small businesses;
- Having the federal SBEAP serve as the secretariat for the development and dissemination of reports and advisory opinions.

In response to the identified needs of the Office's target customer groups, the SBO has undertaken a variety of major outreach efforts, including:

- Serving as liaison between small businesses and the EPA to promote understanding of Agency policy and small business needs and concerns;
- Staffing a small business toll-free hotline that provides regulatory and technical assistance information;
- Maintaining and distributing an extensive collection of information and technical literature developed by the various EPA program offices;

- Making personal appearances as a speaker or panelist at small business related meetings.
- Interfacing on an ongoing basis with over 45 key national trade associations representing several million small businesses and with state ombudsmen who serve businesses at the local level. Also, stays in contact with over 400 additional national organizations that represent millions of small businesses;
- Providing guidance on the development of national policies and regulations that impact small businesses;
- Tracking development and implementation of regulations affecting small businesses in support of the Regulatory Flexibility Act.

The SBO actively seeks feedback on its responsiveness to small business inquiries and ever-evolving needs, primarily in the areas of technical assistance and advocacy. The SBO can “package” relevant information for the most effective and efficient delivery through training seminars, factsheets, or position papers to a targeted audience.

In 1986, the SBO also began serving as the Agency’s Asbestos Ombudsman. In this role, the Office focuses on asbestos-in-schools requirements and handles questions and complaints. Information concerning asbestos management may also be obtained through the small business toll-free hotline at (800) 368-5888.

Additionally, in 2003, the SBO was designated EPA’s Point of Contact under the Small Business Paperwork Relief Act of 2002.

Federal Small Business Environmental Assistance Program (EPA)

EPA, through the federal SBEAP, provides technical guidance for the state SBEAPs in the implementation of their programs. The Federal Small Business Environmental Assistance Program (Federal SBEAP) is coordinated by the Information Transfer Group (ITG) of the Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards (OAQPS). Services provided by the federal SBEAP include:

Electronic Access

The Federal SBEAP is actively involved in expanding the use of electronic media as a tool for access to EPA information by small businesses, state SBEAPs, and the general public.

- The SBEAP home page on the World Wide Web, provides access to EPA Small business assistance information and materials. Links to other small business-related sites also are provided. The SBEAP home page address is www.smallbiz-enviroweb.org.

- The SBEAP home page serves as a communication link for states SBEAPs and includes a list of state and EPA Small business program contacts. The home page also provides a forum to share information and outreach materials developed specifically for small businesses.
- The Office of Air and Radiation, Policy and Guidance home page, part of the Technology Transfer Network, contains proposed and final rules; background, guidance, and plain-English fact sheets; and implementation strategy updates and schedules.

Plain English Guidance Materials

The Federal SBEAP prepares materials for use by the states to explain new EPA rules in plain English. These includes detailed guidebooks with options for compliance, including pollution prevention; sample reporting and recordkeeping forms; and example calculations. These are distributed to state SBEAPs as well as directly to small businesses. Both hard copy and electronic formats are provided to allow for state-specific customization and reproduction as needed.

Satellite Seminars

The Federal SBEAP works with EPA's Small Business Ombudsman (SBO) and OAQPS's Education and Outreach Group to present a series of satellite downlink seminars to educate small businesses on new EPA regulations.

Annual Conference

EPA holds an annual National SBO/SBEAP Conference, which is co-sponsored by the EPA SBO and OAQPS's Federal SBEAP, with participation by various divisions and EPA program offices. The majority of the conference planning and presentations are carried out by the states through a planning committee. The purpose of this conference is to:

- Facilitate communication among the state programs.
- Facilitate implementation and operation of small business assistance programs.
- Interpret regulatory and policy developments affecting small businesses.
- Share EPA activities and programs to assist state SBEAPs.

Other EPA Programs

Other EPA programs participating in activities to assist the states include the Office of Compliance, the Chemical Emergency Preparedness and Prevention Office, and the Pollution Prevention Division.