

STATE SMALL BUSINESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
MULTI-MEDIA AUTHORITY
DRAFT PROPOSAL

GOAL:

Provide multi-media assistance to all small businesses in all states via a comprehensive, efficient and effective vehicle.

BACKGROUND:

In the fall of 2004, representatives of the Small Business Ombudsman/Small Business Assistance Programs, National Steering Committee (NSC), met with EPA leadership to discuss potential authority and support for the Small Business Assistance Programs to provide full program and multi-media* assistance to small businesses throughout the US. EPA's management was very supportive of this goal.

Currently, there are 50 state and 3 territory SBAPs in the US. In 2003, 39 of the 53 programs (73%) offered some type of multi-media services. 52% of the 53 programs had official multi-media authority, while 48% did not. Most programs provide assistance with air regulations, but many states do not have an Ombudsman or Compliance Advisory Panel.

Given the vast number of small businesses (99.7% of the 23.7 million businesses in the US), small business environmental performance is significant to EPA's ability to meet its mission of protecting human health and the environment, and small business survival is critical to the US economy. Although their numbers are vast, the average small business employs 11- 13 people and lacks the resources to research the very complex world of environmental regulation. They need a reliable small business friendly "one-stop-shopping" source of information and assistance. Full implementation of a multi-media program, with an Ombudsman and Small Business Assistance Program, would provide this critical service.

APPROACH:

The States have collected 8-9 examples of how various states have set up multi-media programs. To get the process started, those examples are currently being used by the SBO/SBAP National Steering Committee (NSC) to develop 3-4 examples of model programs representing options of where the programs could be housed in the states and territories (environmental agencies, economic development centers, universities, small business development centers, etc.). The models will represent the variety among programs today, and present opportunities for states to decide where the program would be housed and how it would be administered. A subgroup will draft the models, and the NSC will guide the overall effort with support from EPA and the National Compliance Advisory Panel (NCAP). The NCAP is made up of small business owners. Further work would focus on an EPA incentive program to encourage state participation.

Forum: Since the programs are located in the states, it is essential to garner state support at the highest level. The state programs propose that the state program models be presented by EPA's Administrator to the National Governors Association (NGA) or the Environmental Council of States (ECOS), with a strong recommendation for implementation in all states. This effort with NGA recognizes the need for states to legislatively establish the requirement for the three program components and multi-media authority where they do not now exist, and is intended to build support for the programs.

SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

"Having a multi-media office in your state small business program is every small business-person's dream. We call it the one stop shop for all your help, like a super Wal-Mart store. Not only is everything you need all in one place, but you are more likely to get everything you need done. There is no wondering where to go to get information and you're more likely to ask for more."

- Ken Legler, Houston Wire Works, Inc., Houston, TX

"The small business owner, whose time is limited, finds it infinitely convenient to get information on his requirements from one regulatory contact person! It's so much easier if the person who shows up on your doorstep can answer all your questions instead of you having to make contact with multiple agencies. That's it in a nutshell! We don't have time to run around chasing regulations!"

- Frances Hartwell, Esq., Kadel's Auto Body, Gresham, OR

NEXT STEPS:

- 1) Work with the Governors to develop support for small business assistance;
- 2) Engage trade associations and other stakeholders;
- 3) Target a budget request at \$50 million nationwide
- 4) Discuss with EPA and OMB;
- 5) Develop state models (NSC);
- 6) NSC, NCAP and EPA work with the NGA to build support for the initiative;
- 7) Work with EPA on incentives and economic analysis.

For More Information:

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*multi-media refers to air, water, land and waste management.