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FACT SHEET: Guidance on Considering Climate Change in NEPA Reviews and Conducting Programmatic NEPA Reviews

As part of an ongoing effort to modernize implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act and promote effective and transparent environmental reviews, the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) today released [updated draft guidance](#) for Federal agencies on how to consider greenhouse gas emissions and the impacts of climate change in their NEPA analyses, as well as [final guidance on conducting programmatic NEPA reviews](#). These measures will increase the efficiency of environmental reviews and help agencies make informed decisions that are sound investments of taxpayer dollars and good for American communities.

Draft Guidance on Consideration of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and the Effects of Climate Change

NEPA requires Federal agencies to consider and transparently disclose the potential effects of their actions and decisions on the environment. In many cases, Federal actions have the potential to produce greenhouse gas emissions, and also are at risk of experiencing impacts from a changing climate. The draft guidance, which will be available for 60 days of public comment, outlines how Federal agencies should describe these potential effects when conducting NEPA reviews to allow decision makers and the public to more fully understand the environmental impacts of proposed actions. In turn, agencies will be better able to compare alternatives, and consider measures to reduce the impacts of climate change on Federal resources and investments.

NEPA ensures information on the potential environmental impacts of agency decisions and projects is transparently available to the public; however it does not dictate decisions or project choices. Even in cases where NEPA analyses identify that alternative actions would have fewer environmental impacts, NEPA does not dictate that decision makers must select such alternatives.

The guidance seeks to remove uncertainty and provide agencies with a reasoned approach as to how to describe the effects of greenhouse gas emissions from and the impacts of climate change on their proposed actions. Once finalized, the guidance will provide clarity and consistency among agencies, many of which already evaluate greenhouse gas and climate impacts in their environmental reviews.

The guidance:

Encourages agencies to draw from their experience and expertise to determine the appropriate level (broad, programmatic or project- or site-specific) and type (quantitative or qualitative) of analysis required to comply with NEPA.

Focuses analysis on the projects and actions with the greatest impacts by providing a reference point of 25,000 metric tons of CO₂-equivalent emissions on an annual basis below which a quantitative analysis of GHG emissions is not recommended unless it is easily accomplished.

Counsels agencies to use the information developed during the NEPA review to consider alternatives that are more resilient to the effects of a changing climate; and

Advises agencies to use existing information and science when assessing proposed actions, and highlights tools and methodologies that are available to them for conducting their analyses.

This guidance was called for by the governors, mayors and other local leaders on the President's Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience in their recommendations to the President in November. The Task Force requested the guidance to ensure that projects and investments are advanced with adequate and coordinated consideration of the project design or alternatives relative to climate impacts and greenhouse gas emissions, to avoid unacceptable public health, safety, and financial risks for communities.

This draft guidance updates earlier draft guidance on consideration of climate change in NEPA reviews that was released by CEQ in 2010 and sought public input on how to address land and resource management actions during a 90-day public comment period. CEQ received and considered comments representing a broad range of views from the public, corporations, non-profit organizations, trade associations, and Federal and state agencies before proposing this updated NEPA guidance, which addresses land and resource management actions.

Guidance on Programmatic NEPA reviews

The CEQ guidance on programmatic NEPA reviews released today is designed to assist agency decision makers and the public in understanding the environmental impacts from proposed large-scope Federal actions and activities, and to facilitate agency compliance with NEPA by clarifying the different planning scenarios under which an agency may prepare a programmatic, broad-scale review. This guidance has been requested by Federal agencies as they undertake broad, landscape-scale analyses for proposals that affect the resources they manage. The guidance, which incorporates input from the public and stakeholders, also addresses how agencies can prepare such reviews to ensure they are timely, informative, and useful for advancing decision-making. The goal of this guidance is to encourage a more consistent approach to programmatic NEPA reviews so that the analyses and documentation will allow for the efficient completion of any necessary tiered reviews. It builds on guidance issued in 1981 that explained the use of tiering and its place in the NEPA process.

Background on NEPA Modernization

Since 2010, the Administration has undertaken a broad effort to modernize Federal agency implementation of NEPA to improve the transparency, involvement of the public, and efficiency of environmental reviews. Efforts include launching a NEPA pilot program to identify and promote more efficient ways to do effective environmental reviews that can be replicated across the Federal Government, and forming rapid response teams

to help expedite the review process for transportation, transmission and renewable energy projects, among other actions.

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