



Highlights of [GAO-08-579T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight, House Committee on Science and Technology

Why GAO Did This Study

Established in 1971, the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) library network provides access to critical environmental information that the agency needs to fulfill its mission of protecting human health and the environment. The library network also provides information and services to the public. In fiscal year 2006, the network included 26 libraries across headquarters, regional offices, research centers, and laboratories. These libraries were independently operated by several different EPA program offices, depending on the nature of the libraries' collections. In 2006, facing proposed budget cuts, EPA issued a plan to reorganize the network beginning in fiscal year 2007. The plan proposed a phased approach to closing libraries and dispersing, disposing of, and digitizing library materials.

GAO was asked to summarize the findings in its report being released today, *Environmental Protection: EPA Needs to Ensure That Best Practices and Procedures Are Followed When Making Further Changes to Its Library Network* (GAO-08-304). For this study, GAO reviewed pertinent EPA policies, plans, and guidance and interviewed EPA officials and staff from each of the 26 libraries. GAO made four recommendations in this report aimed at best practices and procedures that EPA should follow when continuing to reorganize its library network. The agency agreed with the recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-579T](#). For more information, contact John B. Stephenson at (202) 512-3841 or stephensonj@gao.gov.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

EPA Needs to Follow Best Practices and Procedures When Reorganizing Its Library Network

What GAO Found

Since 2006, EPA has implemented its library reorganization plan and has closed physical access to the Office of Environmental Information (OEI) headquarters library and three regional office libraries. In the same period, six other libraries in the network independently changed their operations. Some of these libraries digitized, dispersed, or disposed of their materials before EPA had drafted a common set of agencywide library procedures for doing so. Until these procedures are completed, EPA plans no further changes to the library network.

EPA reorganized its library network primarily to generate cost savings through a more coordinated library network and more electronic delivery of services. However, GAO found that EPA did not effectively justify its reorganization decision. According to EPA officials, OEI decided to reorganize its libraries without fully completing the recommended analyses in order to reduce its fiscal year 2007 funding in response to the President's fiscal year 2007 budget proposal.

EPA did not systematically inform the full range of stakeholders on the final configuration of the library network. In addition, EPA libraries varied considerably in the extent to which they communicated with and solicited views from staff, external stakeholders, and experts before and during the reorganization effort. EPA is currently reaching out to stakeholders, including EPA staff and library experts, by holding and attending stakeholder meetings and conferences.

EPA does not yet have an effective strategy to ensure the continuity of library services following the reorganization and does not know the full effect of the reorganization on library services. EPA's library plan describes the reorganization effort as a "phased approach," but it does not provide specific goals, timelines, or feedback mechanisms that allow the agency to measure performance and monitor user needs to ensure a successful reorganization while maintaining quality services. EPA did not follow key practices for a successful transformation, even though the agency made several changes to the library network that could have impaired the continued delivery of library materials and services to its staff and the public.

The several different program offices responsible for the EPA libraries in the network each generally decide how much of their available funding to allocate to their libraries and how to fund their reorganization. However, when faced with a proposed budget reduction of \$2 million in fiscal year 2007, rather than following its normal procedures, OEI directed the regional and headquarters offices to reduce funding for OEI libraries—a reduction of 77 percent for these libraries from the previous fiscal year. EPA did not allocate funds to help closing libraries manage their collections; instead, the responsible program or regional office used its annual funding to pay for these costs.