

2003 PEER Survey of EPA Region 8 Employees

With the assistance of Rock Mountain PEER, Region 8 employees at EPA developed this survey. The purpose of this survey was to allow the employees within the department to express their views concerning the direction of the agency. Responses were organized according to the topic areas in which they fell; respondents were not asked to specifically address these topics area, however the overlap in response topics was considerable. Due to the need to maintain confidentiality specific employee names are not included in the transcription.

In my opinion, EPA Region 8 could best improve its public health and environmental stewardship by:

Combating Political Pressures by the Bush Administration

Professionals:

Resisting the pressure to make every policy and every decision based upon a political agenda. As a public agency EPA will never be entirely free from politics. However, human health & the environment should always be the Agency's overriding concern, not towing the party line as it comes down from the White House.

This administration has politicized EPA to an extreme extent. It's staggering! For example, we are preparing to go out for public comment on options for industry "burden reduction." Five of the six options came from OMB. EPA only generated one. Never have I heard of EPA regulation proposal being determined by outside sources!

Removing political interference from decision making.

The current administration is undermining the incredible progress and accomplishments of the past 30+ years. The EPA Administrator must be less political and more focused on the mission. Reg. 8 can't enforce anything without HQ support – and HQ can't do much under the administration's thumb.

Having a United States President who supports protecting the environment. At this point< president Bush is doing a terrible disservice to the environment and the public he has sworn to protect.

I think most of the downfalls of management are due to the recent administration. Environment is not high on the list of this administration and most of the bad decisions the Region makes is because of them.

Doing what's right for our region & not being influenced by the current administration's political agenda...

It's tough right now with Bush making his decisions and trumping EPA decisions to appease industry...

Less political influence from CEQ.

This is as bad as it was during the Regan Administration only more subtle in the control aspects by the Administration.

Ignoring politics—do what is right by the environment.

Finding a way to escape from what the idiots in D.C. are dictating!

Managers:

Put environmental protection ahead of energy development in thought and word and deed – LITERALLY! Because literally the opposite is true at this time.

Performing its mission instead of catering to administration and industry.

Returning to the standards for standing up for our mission against political influence...

Being independent from the White House & EPA-HQ, state governments and all external interests. But that's unrealistic.

Clerical:

The problem that stands out most is that the current Bush administration is more interested in supporting industry & groups of people with high visibility & money...

Enforcing Environmental Laws

Professionals:

Upholding the trust given by the public that the “Environmental Protection Agency” is advocating for the protection of the environment.

Complying with the spirit & the letter of our environmental laws.

Focusing on env. protection and not energy development!

Working to support the spirit and intent of environmental laws. As an example where that has not happened, the NPDES program did not comment on a controversial project in ND that will discharge polluted waters into the Red River of the North and pollute the waters of Minnesota and Canada and degrade that river contrary to the Boundary waters Treaty of 1909. Minnesota asked EPA for help, and we did not even respond to that request.

Ensuring that the mission statement & goals of EPA are fairly & honestly adhered to.

If these public officials do not want to enforce the laws of the United States they should go work for industry.

EPA has turned a blind eye to Air Quality violations and even rewarded Denver, Salt Lake City and other cities for these violations.

Emphasizing protection of the environment instead of development of natural resources for private sector gain.

Policy priorities and environmental laws are inconsistently applied/enforced from one administration to another. There needs to be a continuity of data collection and analysis, enforcement and compliance with facilities.

Managers:

Empowering EPA technical and professional staff instead of thwarting their efforts to uphold & enforce the laws that are supposed to protect public health and the environment.

Being sued more often.

Full & firm enforcement of the law.

Striving towards a strong policy of protecting and improving the environment, not just allowing degradation of the environment.

Quit trying to stretch regulatory flexibility to the breaking point or the point at which a Pandora's box of consequences that are not at all thought through.

Tell enviros to sue us in areas that make sense not areas that lead to stupid decisions and distract from meaningful work.

Placing more emphasis on advocacy for environmental protection and less concern on making economic considerations part of its decisions, placating and acquiescing to states, and having more concern about environmental impacts rather than impacts on business and political interests.

Really being connected to protecting public health & the environment.

Don't avoid enforcement and promulgation.

Improving Regional Leadership

Professionals:

EPA management in Region 8 is a disaster...

Making Robbie more visible. I've never met him nor does he seem to be a people person.

We have lost our autonomy – everything has to go through Headquarters before any action is taken.

Region 8 needs focus on regional issues & enforce accountability.

Robbie Roberts is invisible to most of the staff. For those at the GS-13 & lower level he makes almost no contact. He asks for no input for such issues as how to make Region 8 more effective & efficient. He is the least visible Administrator in the ___ years I have been at EPA. He has a wealth of information and good ideas at his fingertips and has no clue.

It would help to have a few managers with common sense and backbone. They have lost sight of environmental concerns and concentrate on political concerns.

Replacing Robbie Roberts. He does not appear to have any concern for the environment.

Much of the problem is the political climate and the mandates coming from EPA Headquarters. In my ___ years with EPA R8, I have been most proud of our senior managers when they stopped being “YES” men to DC, and instead did what was RIGHT. Unfortunately, most senior managers/RA/DRA's care less about protecting the environment and more about not making waves (looking good).

The biggest problem with morale is that EPA region 8 is like a classroom out of control. Having an updated Regional Strategic Plan in place.

Managers:

Even if you blow the whistle...the IG is in bed with R8 management. If you push it you will be reassigned or, more likely, FIRED.

Say what we mean and mean what we say.

Assign work & fill mgmt. Positions based on skills & experience, including the ability to manage people, rather than who hustles to please the higher-ups the most.

Explaining to the public & staff the reasons for actions EPA takes – without spin.

According Science a Greater Role

Professionals:

Using science, not politics and public communications specialists for making decisions. Making decisions based on science and letting the elected officials make the political decisions.

Putting sound science ahead of political interest... On science, however, we are demoralized by the erosion of environmental regs in Washington. EPA HQ has attempted to prevent the publishing of journal articles. In this situation Reg. 8 management defended the scientist& the paper was published.

The assistant regional administrator, Gerry Clough... typically disregards any scientific input into decision-making. {He'd] rather be buddies with special interest groups. Doing more to support scientific research.

Weighting science more in the decision-making process.

Cutting its ties w/ industry.

More Resources

Professionals:

Receiving adequate funding to perform mission

Provide more mechanisms to assist in funding clean-up or finding solutions for newly discovered CERCLA sites. Currently, we are not allowed to list sites for lack of funding...Basically, we can find sites, but then have no way to deal with them.

Stronger systematic budgeting in the professional staff. EPA cannot do anything without money.

Managers:

Fight for a meaningful budget, not one for special projects for Congressionals that are not environmental but take it from EPA's operating budget.

More environ. E. funding and support!

We should also devote more of our resources to direct field support & program implementation.

Clerical:

The people in Region 8 strive every day to meet the criteria of our mission. This is difficult when our budget gets slashed, our policies dilute like water and again our enforcement abilities [are] handicapped.

Addressing Dysfunctional Agency Culture and Practices

Professionals:

Being more open about internal policy & decisions w/ staff & media.

Making managers accountable for decisions affecting health of humans & the environment & morale, performance, etc. of their staff...Large staff turnover necessitates increased training, time lost for replacing staff should not be rewarded by bonuses to that supervisor...

Getting new management. Many managers have been at EPA forever & have lost sight of our mission.

Managing beyond the moment.

Raising employee morale in certain programs that need it most.

Stopping removals of staff from work where they have the most experience.

Remove the glass ceiling for minority staff.

Stop shuffling management around to make us ineffective.

The project managers actually taking interest in their projects from beginning to end...Contractors take care of everything, writing the QAIP & SAP, collecting samples, choosing the analytical lab, getting the data validated & giving that information to the project manager. What this creates in someone in charge, but not involved.

Continuing to diversify staff at all levels. New & fresh ideas will move this agency forward.

Hiring and retaining young staff.

Involving professional staff in decision making; acting fair and balanced in treating employees; provide feed back tool into management; providing transparent communications.

Removing failed managers from their supervisory positions once it is clear that change will not take place.

Having programs work together. Having education information given out to all programs.

Doing better resource planning for all business inputs: more Superfund budget shares from HQ; formal management succession plans to deal with planned retirements & personnel aspirations on development plans; better IT architecture, systems, customer help desk workers/hours of operation; more training in diplomacy, economics, & political decision-making process.

Tackling the big issues like emerging data on toxicity of common chemicals, genetic engineering and the effects of toxic chemicals on the fetus.

Getting charter of responsibilities or clearly defined mission statement from Congress. EPA is only government agency not to have one.

Managers:

Senior management protect their own. It's like a bad fraternity who believes they are on a different playing field and don't have to comply with policy & regs that staff must.

Focusing on mission, and employees.

Selecting better personnel for senior and other management positions. Selections over the past couple of years have been baffling at best.

Returning to the empowerment model that was in place before this administration. Staff and managers need to have participation in decision making.

Clerical:

Input should be open to all employees as it is often the trench soldiers that know how the war truly progresses!