

Understanding Pollution: EPA, the Little Known Name behind Pollution Regulation

As humanity has grown to recognize the dangers that pollution poses to humans, animals, and the environment world governments have taken steps to try and mitigate the dangers. This is done through rules and regulations passed and enforced by government agencies. In the United States the agency in charge of pollution control is the Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA for short.ⁱ Now, what does it mean to be an Environmental Protection Agency? Well, there are reasons why the EPA was established, and the EPA has certain areas of responsibility and oversight that it is in charge of. In this article I will explore the history of the EPA, its duties and responsibilities, and its perceived effectiveness in the United States compared to other agencies worldwide.

The EPA was established in 1970 as the American public became aware of the growing dangers that pollution was causing both worldwide, and more specifically, in the United States. It was established to both control the effects of pollution, and reverse as much as possible the damage that had already been done.ⁱⁱ Before the inception of the EPA there were multiple agencies dealing with multiple aspects of pollution. These included the Department of Agriculture, The Department of the Interior, and the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.ⁱⁱⁱ Since its creation in 1970 one of the EPA's original mandates has been to ensure clean air throughout the country through the passing of the Clean Air Act. As time has passed, the responsibilities of the EPA have grown. In 1977 and 1974, the Clean Water Act, and Safe Drinking Water Act gave the EPA the authority to regulate the nation's water supplies, and in 1990 the oil industry was added to the growing list of responsibilities of the EPA.^{iv} The important thing to take away from the history of the EPA is that even though it was established by President Nixon, and the Congress it was done so because the American People demanded that something be done. The EPA is a living memorial to the power of people to positively change the world around us for the better to ensure that we have a world that we WANT to call home.



The EPA is in charge of many aspects of pollution control and environmental protection, but how do they go about controlling pollution? It's actually quite simple. The way that pollution regulation works is that laws are passed in Congress that give the EPA, or another agency, the broad authority to regulate and make rules for specific areas of concern.^v The EPA then issues rules and regulations that apply at the local, state, and federal levels.^{vi} As pollution is an ever evolving issue, the EPA must have the ability to adjust and adapt to those issues. Let's look at oil waste removal for an example of how the EPA regulates. The EPA classifies oil as a hazardous waste, and breaks down the different companies that use oil into three categories: conditionally exempt, small generator, and large generator. Then, depending on which category you fall into you need to meet certain requirements. These can include training in specific waste removal techniques, weekly inspections, the length of time waste can remain on your premises, how materials need to be transported, and keeping an accurate manifest of your supply of wastes.^{vii} The EPA makes rules such as these for every industry which it is required to regulate. To ensure compliance with its rules and regulations the EPA has several things it can do to enforce its rulings. For the most minor of infractions a simple warning letter is sent to whatever individual or business is violating the rules. For the next level of infraction the EPA gets a court order requiring the business to bring its activities in line with current regulations. If a problem persists the EPA initiates a lawsuit against the offender, sends another letter demanding that offender's compliance with the regulations, and fines them. Finally, for the worst of offenders the EPA has the authority

to bring criminal charges which can lead to massive fines, and even jail time.^{viii} As you can see, the EPA is an agency that does seek to work with people, and has a well tiered system for ensuring compliance.



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In terms of the rest of the world the United States is ahead of the game in terms of trying to regulate pollution. The U.S. began with regulating air quality in 1970. Most developing nations, such as Pakistan and most other Middle Eastern countries, do not seek to regulate air quality at all.^{ix} Even major countries like China who do have national regulations for air pollution do not enforce those regulations, or as in the case of Thailand, their regulations are more than 30 years old.^x Despite the fact that the U.S. is leading the way in pollution regulation, there are still many who criticize the U.S. for not doing enough. Part of the reason for this criticism is the lobbying of Congress done by the different industries, such as oil and coal that fall under the regulations of the Environmental Protection Agency. The main purpose of most businesses is to make money, and the EPA regulations, while good for the environment and human health, are affecting businesses' profits. In 1982, the Noise Control Act was passed, which gave the EPA the right to regulate noise pollution. Due to heavy lobbying by many business groups, the act was left with very little teeth to it.^{xi} If the United States wants to continue to ensure the health and long life of its people more needs to be done.



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Ultimately, the EPA is not the panacea to pollution. It is only one agency that effects only a single country. Pollution is worldwide. The air that we breathe today could be in Canada, Brazil, Germany, or China in just a few days, and the reverse is true. The true value of the EPA lies in the fact that it was created at the behest of a populace that was truly alarmed by the dangers of pollution that they saw building. It is a testament to the fact that if we want to change the world we can. Together, there are no limits to what the human race can accomplish. So, for the health and wellbeing of ourselves, and our planet we must once more, as we did in 1970, come together to tell the not just the United States Government, but the world that we want to see real solutions to the problems that pollution is forcing upon us every day.

About the Author



Dominick Principe is a graduate of Rowan University with dual Bachelor Degrees in Elementary Education and Writing Arts. He is a prolific reader who devours any book put before him, and feels that life is one great long book without an end. He fills his hours constantly exploring new information, and seeking to educate himself in the ways of the world. He puts all of that knowledge and his passion for learning to good use teaching English as a second

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ⁱ "The Environmental Protection Agency." *About*. United States Government. Web. 17 Nov. 2014.

ⁱⁱ "The Environmental Protection Agency." *About*. United States Government. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. <<http://usgovinfo.about.com/od/technologyandresearch/a/aboutepa.htm>>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "EPA." *Duties Transferred to*. Environmental Protection Agency. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. <<http://www2.epa.gov/aboutepa/duties-transferred-epa>>.

^{iv} "Pollution Issues." *Laws and Regulations, United States*. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.pollutionissues.com/Ho-Li/Laws-and-Regulations-United-States.html>>.

^v "Pollution Issues." *Laws and Regulations, United States*. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.pollutionissues.com/Ho-Li/Laws-and-Regulations-United-States.html>>.

^{vi} "Pollution Issues." *Laws and Regulations, United States*. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.pollutionissues.com/Ho-Li/Laws-and-Regulations-United-States.html>>.

^{vii} "Used Oil and Hazardous Waste Management." *EPA*. Environmental Protection Agency. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. <http://www.epa.gov/region10/pdf/owcm/EPA-910-K-13-001_UsedOilAndHazardousWasteManagement_web.pdf>.

^{viii} "Pollution Issues." *Laws and Regulations, United States*. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.pollutionissues.com/Ho-Li/Laws-and-Regulations-United-States.html>>.

^{ix} Peltier, Ally, and Lucy Oppenheimer. "Do Most Countries in the World Have Some Sort of Air Quality Standards?" *WiseGeek*. Conjecture, 8 Oct. 2014. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.wisegeek.com/do-most-countries-in-the-world-have-some-sort-of-air-quality-standards.htm>>.

^x Peltier, Ally, and Lucy Oppenheimer. "Do Most Countries in the World Have Some Sort of Air Quality Standards?" *WiseGeek*. Conjecture, 8 Oct. 2014. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.wisegeek.com/do-most-countries-in-the-world-have-some-sort-of-air-quality-standards.htm>>.

^{xi} "Pollution Issues." *Laws and Regulations, United States*. Web. 17 Nov. 2014. <<http://www.pollutionissues.com/Ho-Li/Laws-and-Regulations-United-States.html>>.