
From: Mike Heaney [mtheaney@mindspring.com]
Sent: Friday, August 13, 2004 4:18 PM
To: ADMIN-S&E
Subject: Don't Castrate NEPA

Honorable Secretary Ridge,

The Department of Homeland Security's current proposal for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act allows too many loopholes and closes off government activities that have previously operated in the public eye.

One of NEPA's purposes is to allow public review of agency actions that may adversely affect the environment. Your department's proposal impedes that purpose with its overly broad use of categorical exclusions. While categorical exclusions are useful for exempting routine activities that pose no risk of environmental harm, some of the proposed exclusions involve types of activities that could cause significant harm. Some proposed categorical exclusions, such as logging and disposal of waste and hazardous material, should be completely abandoned, while many other items should be narrowed in scope.

Also, although I support the mission of the Department of Homeland Security, the breadth of the undefined categories of information that would be withheld from public view is a tremendous expansion of the current policy that allows only classified information to be withheld from NEPA documents. This is unwarranted for protecting national security. Information, such as analysis of a gas pipeline's potential for leaks and explosions, is critical to the public's ability to protect itself and should not be withheld. The proposal should be more specific so as to minimize withheld information and maximize transparency.

The proposal goes far beyond what is necessary to protect national security, and risks destroying the very democratic ideals that all Americans cherish. I urge you to limit the use of categorical exclusions and the withholding of information as narrowly as possible.

Sincerely,