

Echols, Mabel E.

From: Amy D Kyle,
Sent: Monday, March 16, 2009 12:03 PM
To: FN-OMB-OIRA-Submission
Subject: comments pursuant to 74 FR 8819

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the development of executive guidance for review of agency regulations, as noted in the notice published at 74 FR 8819 (Feb. 26, 2009).

The existing executive order should be revisited, and this review is an encouraging and positive step.

Though I agree that cost should in most cases be one of the factors considered in public policy decisions, the current practice for implementing this executive order is detrimental to sound public policy in several ways. Below I have noted a few that should be addressed in the revisions. The time allowed for this review was very short, so this covers only the most important points.

1. The future should not be discounted.

The executive order has led to use of standard cost-benefit principles in assessing environmental health policies. These are based on valuation in monetary terms. However, much of what environmental protection and environmental health statutes are supposed to protect are not easily valued in monetary terms.

One particular issue is the use of discounting. It may make sense to discount the future value of money for things that are bought and sold in the market. However, when it comes to things like the ecological integrity of the planet and the God-given abilities of children to learn, there is no rationale to discount these because they occur in the future. This needs to be recognized.

2. Equity is a critical concern.

The executive order has led to the use of standard cost-benefit principles that do not allow for consideration of equity or environmental justice in decision-making. This is a critical flaw because, while the environmental protection program has been fairly successful on average, it has been dismally unsuccessful in protecting some.

A critical priority has got to be to enhance capacity to improve the environment for those at greatest risk, often in environmental justice communities. We need a review process that supports this goal, rather than making it impossible to achieve, as does the existing executive order.

3. We need to move beyond myopia.

Most current approaches to environmental protection consider only a single pollutant at a time. We know that this is scientifically incorrect. We know that disease is caused by mechanisms that can be activated or affected by more than one pollutant. We also know that health is affected by other factors that interact with environmental factors.

We need to move beyond the self-imposed myopia of this executive order that reflects the scientific understanding of the 1960s and develop more sophisticated way to analyze the importance of the environment to health.

Very truly yours,
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