

January 18, 1985



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

Honorable Lee M. Thomas
Acting Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency
Washington, D.C. 20460

OFFICE OF
THE ADMINISTRATOR

Dear Mr. Thomas:

The Research Outlook Review Subcommittee of the Science Advisory Board met in Washington, D.C., on November 28, 1984, to review the Agency's current five-year research and development plan, formerly known as the "Research Outlook" but now entitled the "Long-range Research Agenda." This letter report summarizes the Subcommittee's conclusions of the process by which the document was prepared.

The purpose of the Congressional requirement that the Office of Research and Development prepare an annual "Research Outlook" was to institute a strategic research planning process in the Agency. The Subcommittee strongly endorses the development of a long-term research strategy; however, Science Advisory Board experience with the review of this document over eight years has demonstrated that the process and the resulting document has not met this goal. This year's document is no exception.

The Office of Research and Development made an effort to include the Assistant Administrators of the various program offices into the development of the current "Long-range Research Agenda." Together with the chairmen and staffs of the research committees, they identified environmental issues and the research necessary to resolve those issues. This approach, although an improvement over previous years' efforts, once again resulted in a document that only estimates research needs over the short-term; actually, it only reflects research already in place. The document is essentially bankrupt of new ideas, innovation, and a forward look.

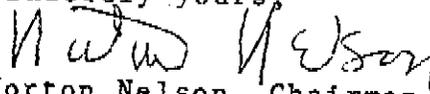
The Subcommittee believes that the failure of the "Research Outlook" to achieve a goal of coherent and continuous long-term research planning results in part from an annual discontinuity in the process. This process is responsive mainly to budgetary limitations and the exigencies of EPA's short-term mission requirements which inherently leads to a document that is produced as its own end and not as a long-term research plan.

We therefore recommend that the Congress withdraw its charge and that the development of a "Research Outlook" or a "Long-range Research Agenda" be discontinued on the basis that such a document does not meet the Agency's need for a research plan. In one important respect, its preparation is even counter-productive to more forward-looking strategic research planning because it drains needed resources away from the latter objective.

Research planning should be initiated and carried out by the Office of Research and Development. It must follow a rational and coherent design. A research strategy has to be articulated so that it can serve as a basis for the development of an annually updated research agenda. Such a strategy must include an assessment of emerging environmental issues and alternative approaches to their resolution and must have the innate flexibility to adjust direction as perceived problems become non-problems either through solution or the correction of misconceptions. The group responsible for developing and implementing a research strategy should be in a position to avail itself of expertise such as that found in academic and other research centers and the National Academy of Sciences by commissioning white papers on the subject of research futures. Such an approach can yield the elements of a forward-looking and implementable research plan.

The Subcommittee has already transmitted individual comments and editorial remarks to ORD staff. In summary, we conscientiously performed the scientific review, but at the same time we express the hope that our recommendation for abolishing the document will be heeded.

Sincerely yours,


Norton Nelson, Chairman
Executive Committee


John M. Neuhold, Chairman
Research Outlook Review
Subcommittee