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

October 21, 1992

EPA-SAB-RSAC-LTR-93-001
The Honorable William K. Reilly
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
401 M St. S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

OFFICE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR
SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD

Subject: Research Strategies Advisory Committee Review of the EPA draft "Stimulating Environmental Progress: A Social Science Research Agenda"

Dear Mr. Reilly:

A panel of the Research Strategies Advisory Committee (RSAC) of EPA's Science Advisory Board (SAB) met on January 22, 1992, to review the EPA draft document "Stimulating Environmental Progress: A Social Science Research Strategy" in Alexandria, Virginia. The panel, which was composed of members from a wide variety of disciplines, was gratified to see that EPA is taking this first step to integrate social sciences into environmental decision-making and encourages the Agency in its efforts.

In examining the proposals contained within the draft document, the panel focused on determining: 1) whether the Agency used the appropriate criteria for identifying and applying its priorities; 2) whether a proper balance was struck between short term and continuing efforts; 3) how such activities are integrated into broader activities within and outside of the Agency; and, 4) the responsiveness of the plan to recommendations of the SAB "Future Risk" report. The following summaries provide our responses to each of these charges:

1) Has the Agency used the appropriate criteria for identifying and applying its priorities?

The Committee feels that the document provides a useful framework for considering social science issues in environmental protection. However, it is the general feeling of the members that categorizing issues by specific environmental problem (e.g. indoor air, hazardous waste, etc.) is of limited utility for prioritization, serving only to mimic the organizational structure of the Agency. Instead, we recommend that the Agency approach prioritization by concentrating on cross-cutting environmental issues (e.g. pollution prevention, economic incentives of pollution control, etc.). This would afford planners and decision makers the opportunity to relate social science issues to generic environmental problems

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and related decisions, and to determine the overall direction of necessary long term components of the program. This could enhance the ability of social sciences strategists to affect the psychology of the Agency which controls utilization of social science tools by identifying a broad issue and demonstrating the potential impact of social sciences activities.

2) Has a proper balance been struck between short and long term efforts?

The Committee is unable to discern the relationship between the short and long term research proposed within the document. It was estimated that approximately $2 million are currently devoted to "ad-hoc" social science activities. If this is indeed the case, most efforts would be problem specific and of shorter term in duration.

In order to effectively balance the Agency's overall needs, the panel recommends that the strategy give increased attention to longer term efforts (with probable results/products within 2 to 5 years) and through a core effort established with an initial base of at least $5 million.

3) How are such activities integrated into broader activities within and outside of the Agency?

It is unclear to the panel how the issues proposed in the strategy relate to broader social science concerns (both within the United States and abroad). This situation reflects a lack of formal tracking of social sciences research activities which has contributed to unsuccessful efforts to date by other groups attempting to identify annual levels of effort for Federally funded social science research projects.

To address intra-Agency integration, we also recommend that the Agency begin identifying social sciences efforts as discrete items in planning and budgeting exercises in order to enhance identification and coordination of such activities.

The document should also separate items which are potential EPA funding items from those more appropriately funded by NSF.

4) <u>Is the responsive to recommendations of the SAB "Future Risk" report?</u>

The Committee is pleased to note that the draft document cites a number of SAB reports which influenced its initiation and development and that the document is itself a major Agency response to the recommendation for social sciences research "Future Risk".

In addition, Committee members noted several additional issues concerning the document. These comments, along with specific line-by-line recommendations have been forwarded to the program office along with more recent comments provided by Executive Committee members:

a) A clearer focus is needed on the purpose of social science research in EPA -- Why do we need information on individual and institutional decision-making? How will we use it? How can changes in social behavior be maintained?

b) The authors should attempt to more tightly focus the baseline for environmental action. Whom do we target for social science research? Which segments of society? What population groups?

c) Possible applications for such efforts should be more clearly defined. (e.g. methodologies for risk and policy managers which would enable them to develop action strategies and predict outcomes; curriculum for schools, public administration programs, and environmental studies; products for use by community leaders, and directors of institutions or facilities).

d) The document is positive in tone and prospective in viewpoint. While this type of format is appropriate for defining research options and establishing priority setting schemes, a retrospective look at both successful and unsuccessful historical efforts would also be helpful (e.g., examination of Agency experiences with asbestos, radon and emissions trading).

e) The Committee suggests that additional attention be paid to defining the terms "basic social science research", "applied research" and "assessment and measurement". Additionally, the search for alternative prioritizing schemes should not be abandoned.

f) The document should address how different elements of society influence attitudes towards environmental issues. For example, how are attitudes shaped by media, religion, education, entertainment, business, government?

g) The Agency should somehow address the impact/influence of litigation/liability for polluting. How do these liability issues affect environmentally-related decisions?

In conclusion, the Committee again applauds the Agency's efforts in responding to Future Risk in this area. We also strongly support an expansion of these activities and encourage the identification of a lead office for social sciences activities and establishment of a coordinating council for social science research. We also recommend the research efforts be integrated with other environmental research and reiterate our recommendation to establish an combined initial $5 million base level of effort -- essential for attracting talented researchers --for longer term social science efforts identified as discrete items within Agency planning and budgeting exercises.

Again, we are pleased to have had the opportunity to comment on this strategy and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Raymond C. Loehr

Dr. Raymond C. Loehr, Chair

Science Advisory Board

Alvin L. Alm

Mr. Alvin Alm, Chair

Research Strategies Advisory Committee

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