

**THE CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT INFORMATION:
MAKING INVOLVEMENT ACCESSIBLE**

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ABSTRACT

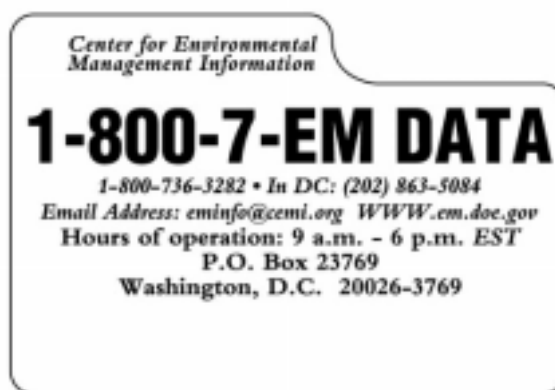
The U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) Environmental Management (EM) program was created to safely manage Cold War era waste cleanup. When weapons production stopped after the Cold War, DOE faced the monumental task of cleaning up the resulting nuclear and hazardous waste. DOE and its predecessor agencies operated in secrecy for so many years; yet the 1990s ushered in a change of course. With the commitment to clean up waste, DOE is also committed to involving the public more directly in its decision-making processes. In order to facilitate this openness and commitment to involve stakeholders, EM has established the Center for Environmental Management Information (CEMI). CEMI is EM's primary information source, offering a toll-free information number, a library of both general and technical documents and videos, a WWW site, and a distribution system. By providing an information center for callers and visitors and by reaching out to stakeholders, CEMI is carrying out EM's vision to more fully involve the public in the decisions that affect DOE and the community at large.

INTRODUCTION

"I'm researching historical budget data for my federal client. What can you give me on the Environmental Management program's expenditures?"

"I'm writing a report on nuclear energy for my high school chemistry class. It's due in three days. Can you help me?"

"I need to find out more about the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. I'm angry that the government's dumping its waste in my state. How do I find out more about the plant's activities?"



CEMI Promotional Rolodex Card

A contractor. A student. An activist. Three individuals with three very different needs all call the same place: the Center for Environmental Management Information (CEMI). Established in 1993, CEMI serves as the Department of Energy's primary source for information, publications, videos, and other resources on the Environmental Management program. As the nation's largest

nuclear cleanup effort, the Environmental Management program generates large public interest. Contractors, students, and activists—as well as federal employees and interested members of the public—regularly turn to CEMI for reliable information, materials, and referrals, calling its toll-free phone number, visiting its library and staff, or surfing the web for the most up-to-date data on this important program.

CEMI'S HISTORY

CEMI owes its existence to the growing movement within the Department of Energy to involve the public in its decision-making processes. For many decades, the Department of Energy operated in secrecy. Created out of a World War II nuclear weapons production effort—the Manhattan Project—the Department became accustomed to shrouding its activities in the interest of national security. During the 1990s, this pattern began to reverse. The Environmental Management program, established in 1989 to handle the contamination and waste created by nuclear weapons production, research, and testing activities began to open its doors to the public and established the Office of Intergovernmental and Public Accountability to expedite this effort. This office works through a variety of initiatives, including CEMI, to inform the public and involve it more fully in Environmental Management decision-making.

THE CEMI BASICS

CEMI offers three primary services to its many information seekers:

- a library and resource center
- publications, exhibits, and briefings
- world-wide web design, support, and outreach

CEMI'S LIBRARY AND RESOURCE CENTER

CEMI's library is conveniently located a block away from DOE headquarters in Washington, DC. CEMI offers both general and technical publications, videos, and some specialized teaching materials; a toll-free phone number for easy access to program information; a computer terminal for on-line research; and a distribution system which provides materials to the public free of charge.

Unlike many resource centers, CEMI is staffed with information specialists who are trained to answer callers' questions and assist them with their research. Callers frequently request one of several popular documents; however, they sometime challenge the specialists with more specific programmatic questions. Stakeholders want to know how to get involved; headquarters program



offices need assistance in distributing a new document; contractors want to learn about upcoming contracts; site officials need assistance publicizing a breaking story; and an eighth grader

Information Specialists are always prepared by using a series of regularly updated training manuals.

needs information on the Manhattan Project for a science project. These are everyday questions from individuals interested in EM's mission, and CEMI's information specialists are on hand from 9:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. Eastern Standard Time to answer them. CEMI also serves as a point-of-contact and refers callers to other information centers or DOE offices as needed. The inquisitive and the concerned are given equal care, and many of the callers have made CEMI their primary resource for EM information.

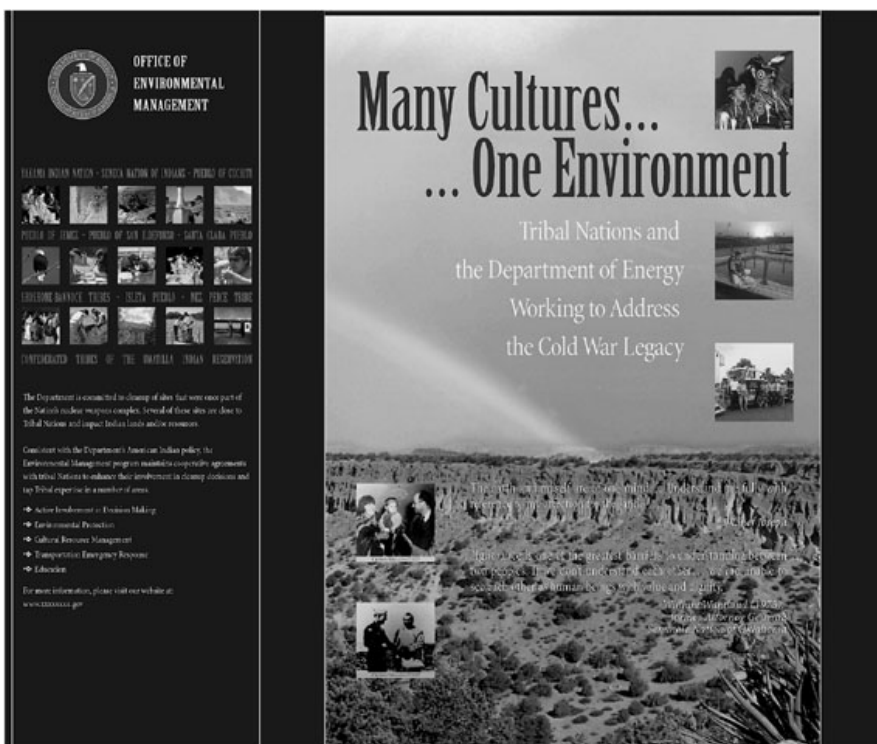
To serve customers efficiently, CEMI maintains a library of the most up-to-date program materials available. Information specialists periodically contact representatives from DOE headquarters, sites, and laboratories to ensure that appropriate documents, pamphlets, news clippings, records of decision, environmental impact statements, and videos are routed to CEMI's library. Once documents arrive, information specialists brief each other on the documents' contents and points of interest. Each document is logged into CEMI's textbase and is made available to the public within 48 hours of the time it was received.

A textbase is an extremely powerful database. For example, a single field in a textbase can store a whole document, while a typical database field can hold only a limited number of characters. CEMI's textbase contains information describing all of the Center's resources. When available, specialists list the entire abstract, executive summary, and table of contents for each document to help users in their quest for information. This textbase allows information specialists, as well as walk-in visitors, to search for items by author, subject, title, publication date, and document number.

CEMI's high standard of service requires training. Information specialists receive ongoing training including annual, day-long customer service workshops on EM program updates, laws and regulations, phone etiquette, and referral contacts. In addition, staff have training manuals they can consult for help in serving customers.

CEMI'S PUBLICATIONS, EXHIBITS, AND BRIEFINGS

In addition to its toll-free phone number, CEMI provides information on EM initiatives through its publications and exhibits. CEMI writers and graphic designers produce a quarterly newsletter, EM Progress, which reaches approximately 15,000 stakeholders, federal employees, and contractors. The newsletter publicizes waste cleanup efforts and opportunities for public involvement around the nation. EM



This EM Tribal exhibit caught the attention of DOE employees when it made its debut in the DOE headquarters lobby.

Progress's readers have responded enthusiastically to this publication: "A very worthwhile publication" and "Very interesting and informative" are just two of the many comments CEMI has received about this newsletter.

CEMI realizes, however, that there are many people affected by cleanup decisions and activities who may not read DOE publications. These people are not unreachable. CEMI creates interactive displays and exhibits to reach groups of people who have a limited amount of time to devote to learning about the program. CEMI recently created an exhibit for EM's Tribal Program, entitled, Many Cultures...One Environment, this exhibit highlights DOE's involvement and partnership with Tribes. Displayed at trade shows and program meetings around the country, CEMI's exhibits are interesting, visually appealing, and packed with information. By watching loop videotapes or interacting with touch-screen video programs, viewers acquire an overview of the EM program quickly and easily.

When the time comes for EM employees to get their message to everyone from stakeholders to the Secretary of Energy, CEMI produces briefings. CEMI has produced briefings for site meetings, as well as one for the EM staff to brief Secretary Richardson on Tribal Programs.

CEMI'S WORLD-WIDE WEB DESIGN SUPPORT AND OUTREACH

Reaching out to the public is now easier than ever with the increasing use of the world-wide web, and CEMI has played an important part in developing and maintaining EM's Internet web site. From creating the bulk of Office of Intergovernmental and Public Accountability's (EM-22) home page to finding new and better links, CEMI uses the Internet as a major outreach tool.

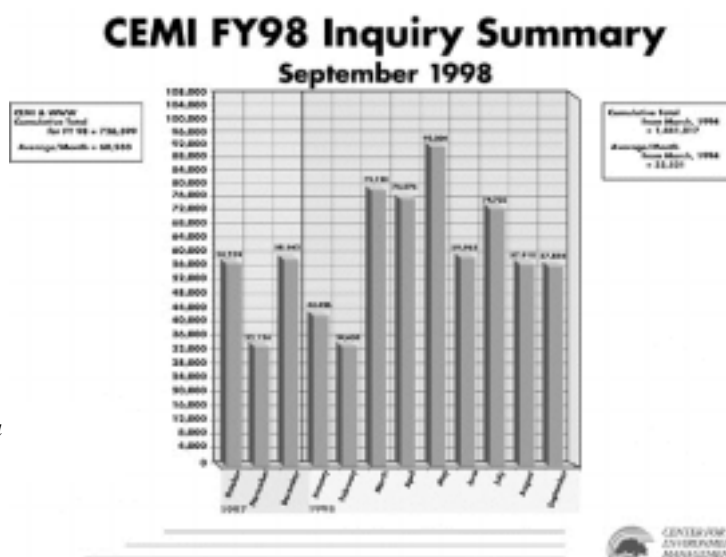
CEMI is currently working with EM to create an integrated network which will contain an Intranet and Extranet. The Intranet will link program employees at headquarters, while the Extranet will link the entire EM complex from Hanford, Washington, to Aiken, South Carolina, increasing employee productivity and reducing costs. CEMI's role in Internet, Intranet, and Extranet services is enhancing employee communication, collaborative research, and public access to EM activities and personnel.

The EM home page contains CEMI's publication order form which customers can use to submit their information requests. In addition, CEMI is currently working on putting its newsletter, EM Progress, on the web the day it is mailed. This activity will help the Department save money by reducing its printing volume and mailing costs.

CEMI'S ONGOING COMMITMENT

Enhancing public access to EM resources and involving stakeholders more fully in the program is not only

CEMI consistently receives thousands of requests via telephone, e-mail, and walk-ins every month.



CEMI's first priority: it is its very reason for existence. Everyone is affected by environmental management decisions, and everyone should be afforded the opportunity to participate by expressing opinions, researching issues, and offering input into the democratic process of policy-making. As EM's primary information source, CEMI helps make these goals possible. Thousands of callers, visitors, and Internet users know that they can turn to CEMI for reliable, knowledgeable, courteous, timely, and no-cost information services.

Numbers are easily measured and graphs quickly plotted; however, CEMI's service commitments go much farther than statistics. CEMI seeks to ensure customers are satisfied, and the truest way of finding this information is by asking. In late 1996, CEMI sent a customer service survey to some of its past customers. Over 90% of those who responded to the survey gave their experience contacting CEMI a rating of good to excellent, (with 8% responding average) and 100% of those responding said that they would contact CEMI again. CEMI is preparing a new survey to update its customer feedback.

The tide has changed within the Department of Energy. Gone are the days of keeping the public in the dark; new is an era of openness and a free flow of information. There are countless mechanisms by which the public can become an active part in the nuclear and hazardous waste cleanup process, and CEMI's goal is to be the first turning point for the contractor, the student, and the activist when they desire to take a part in their community, nation, and world.