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before the

Small Business Committee
U.S. House of Representatives

October 11, 2017

Good morning, Chairman Chabot, Ranking Member Velazquez and Members of the Committee. I am Steve Fine, acting Chief Information Officer at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the EPA's implementation of the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA).

Congress has charged the EPA with enforcing several statutes to protect human health and the environment. In order to ensure the requirements of these statutes are met, the EPA must collect information from the public. EPA has just over 400 OMB-approved collections with a total overall burden of approximately 174,000,000 hours. This is approximately 1.5% of the total federal government burden. EPA collections range from over 21,000,000 hours for the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Program to less than 10 hours for the Mobile Air Conditioner Retrofitting Program. The agency is cognizant of the impact these collections have on small businesses and other entities and works to find ways to reduce that burden while satisfying the responsibilities assigned by statutes.

Implementation of the Paperwork Reduction Act

The PRA mandates that federal agencies follow a necessarily robust process to ensure that they are only collecting information that is needed and are doing so in the least burdensome way possible. Under the PRA, an agency must obtain approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) before using identical questions to collect information from 10 or more persons, even if responding to the request is voluntary for the recipient. To gather information in such circumstances, the EPA must prepare an Information Collection Request (ICR), which describes the information to be collected, gives the reason the information is needed, and estimates the time and cost for the public to answer the request. Examples of information collections include surveys, permit applications, questionnaires, and compliance reports.

At the EPA, subject matter experts in program offices—who are familiar with the requirements of the program, the information being collected and the affected public—develop ICRs. Each program office follows a process established by EPA’s PRA office.

ICRs are subject to a 6- to 10-month internal agency review and approval process. The agency’s PRA office conducts an independent review of each ICR, and each ICR is also shared with the public twice for comment via Federal Register Notices. In addition, the agency consults with a sample of affected entities. Agency ICR preparers and reviewers consider factors such as whether the collection is required to achieve the stated environmental objective, whether there is practical utility to the information being collected, whether the proposed collection method is appropriate and efficient, whether less frequent collection of information would be sufficient, whether the calculation of the estimated burden is accurate, and whether the information is collected elsewhere. Public comments inform agency reviews. After agency review, ICRs are sent to OMB for further review.

Approved ICRs are valid for up to three years. If data collection will continue beyond that timeframe, an ICR must be renewed. The review process for a renewal includes the same evaluations as are conducted for a new information collection.

Burden Reduction Efforts

The EPA is sensitive to the burden it places on regulated entities and uses multiple approaches to reduce unnecessary reporting and recordkeeping burdens on the public. For example, both the program office and the ICR office independently consider whether each part of a proposed information collection has practical utility, is limited in scope to only that necessary for the intended purpose, and imposes the least burden.

Also, where feasible, the agency obtains information from other federal sources, instead of the public. For example, instead of requesting some information from coastal states that are seeking final approval of their Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Programs, the EPA obtains that information from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which collects that information for its own needs.

Additionally, the EPA is increasingly using information technologies to reduce burden by streamlining the information collection process. For instance, the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) involves reporting by more than 20,000 companies per year and has been a flagship for electronic reporting since 2002. This year, the EPA enhanced TRI's primary submission instrument, which is used by thousands of facilities to describe their toxic chemical inventories and document significant events (releases, transfers, disposals, etc.). The enhancements included new features such as automated data quality checks and a simplified password resetting process. These enhancements are expected to reduce average reporting time by 13% for each of the approximately 80,000 forms submitted

annually. Another example is new software systems under development that are anticipated to reduce reporting burdens related to public water systems by 23%.

Further, the agency is in the process of developing a Strategic Plan covering Fiscal Years 2018 – 2022. The draft plan shared with the public for comment includes a strategic measure for the reduction of reporting burden on the regulated community. This would be one of roughly two dozen measures that would be tracked at the highest levels of the agency.

The EPA remains committed to working with small businesses and other regulated entities to find ways to collect the information we need to protect human health and the environment in the least burdensome manner possible. Again, thank you for this opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.