



# Environmental News

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## EPA SEEKS COMMENT ON PILOT ONLINE TOOL TO ACCESS FACILITIES' ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE

*Citizens, Industry Can Access Environmental Records on More Than 800,000 Facilities*

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Today, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that on Wednesday, November 20, it will release an innovative pilot information tool that gives the public and industry direct access to the current environmental compliance record of more than 800,000 regulated facilities nationwide.

EPA is seeking public comment on Enforcement and Compliance History Online (ECHO), which was developed in partnership with the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS), a national association representing State and territorial environmental commissioners. When final, ECHO provides users detailed facility reports, which include:

- Federal and State compliance inspections;
- Environmental violations;
- Recent formal enforcement actions taken; and
- Demographic profile of surrounding area.

“We encourage all parties interested in environmental protection -- industry, environmental groups, citizens -- to review ECHO during the 60-day pilot period and give us reactions and suggestions about how to make it as useful and effective as we can,” John Peter Suarez, EPA’s Assistant Administrator for Enforcement and Compliance Assurance. “We believe that ECHO will significantly increase public awareness of information about environmental compliance.”

“The States have been leaders in the development of data systems that provide information to citizens. We have formed an effective, ongoing partnership with EPA to improve both the quality and accessibility of data,” said Steve Thompson, Chair, ECOS Compliance Committee, and Executive Director, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality. “We also understand that care must be taken to present the data in such a way as to reduce unintended misunderstanding of the data.”

As will be announced in the Federal Register later this week, the 60-day comment period provides users and other interested parties, particularly those responsible for facilities included within the database, an opportunity to review and comment on ECHO’s content, design and data accuracy. In addition, ECHO provides an online error reporting process to ensure continued public participation on data quality.

Benefits of ECHO include:

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- Although all of the information on ECHO was previously available to the public, ECHO provides benefits, including a single point of access to environmental compliance information;
- Providing citizens with easier to understand information regarding environmental issues;
- Allowing companies to use ECHO as a tool to monitor their record of compliance under federal environmental laws; and
- Assisting regulated entities in achieving compliance with their environmental obligations.

The easy-to-use Web tool that will be available beginning on Wednesday, found at [www.epa.gov/echo](http://www.epa.gov/echo), integrates EPA and State compliance information for facilities regulated under the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. Data reports are updated monthly and cover a two-year period. The system retrieves information from Federal and State data entered into EPA databases: the Air Facility System, which provides information on compliance with air permits for various stationary sources of air pollution; the Permit Compliance System, which provides information on companies issued permits to discharge waste water into rivers; and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act Information System, a national program management and inventory system about hazardous waste handlers. Moreover, ECHO includes links to additional State enforcement and compliance information.

EPA has field-tested ECHO's approach and data through the Sector Facility Indexing Project (<http://www.epa.gov/sfipmtn1/>), which presents data for a limited number of industrial sectors, and through a recent four-State pilot in the Pacific Northwest. Public feedback and lessons learned from these projects contributed to ECHO's development.

To ensure that ECHO's data is of high quality, EPA and the States also conducted a comprehensive data review and established an EPA-State network of "data stewards" to manage, research and correct reported errors, as appropriate. Furthermore, ECHO includes an online error reporting process that allows users to alert EPA and the States to possible errors

More about ECHO and details regarding the 60-day comment period are published in the Federal Register at <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/index.html>.

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