Closure of EPA Libraries
House Committee on Science and Technology
Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight
March 13, 2008

Statement by Congressman F. James Sensenbrenner

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established its library network in 1971, one year after the Agency's creation. Since that time, the network grew to 26 libraries, serving both EPA staff and the public. In 2004, EPA's Office of Environmental Information (OEI) completed a cost-benefit analysis of EPA's library services. OEI concluded that the libraries provided "substantial value" to the agency and to the public, with a benefit-to-cost ratio ranging between 2:1 and 5.7:1. These benefits were based on time savings for EPA staff because of the benefits of assistance from a professional librarian.

In FY2007, EPA began restructuring its libraries to transition from walk-in services to electronic dissemination. As part of the restructuring, EPA closed 5 of its libraries and restricted access to 8 more. In theory, EPA's restructuring would improve access to library materials by making them available electronically and reduce costs by eliminating the need for some of the physical structures. In practice, however, the implementation of the plan appears to have restricted access without providing any cost savings.

The Union of Concerned Scientists found that 35.6% of surveyed EPA scientists (555 total) agreed with the statement: the "recent changes and closures in the EPA library system have impaired my ability to do my job." This sentiment was much higher, nearly 50%, for scientists who practiced in areas where a physical library was actually closed.

In a report released at today's hearing, titled *EPA Needs to Ensure that Best Practices and Procedures are Followed When Making Further Changes to its Library Network*, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that, not only has service been interrupted, but also that EPA failed to document any costs savings. GAO wrote:

> EPA's primary rationale for the library network reorganization was to generate cost savings by creating a more coordinated library network

> and increasing the electronic delivery of services. However, EPA did not fully follow procedures recommended in a 2004 EPA study of steps that should be taken to prepare for a reorganization. In particular, EPA did not fully evaluate alternative models, and associated costs and benefits, of library services.

Government Accountability Office, *EPA Needs to Ensure that Best Practices and Procedures are Followed When Making Further Changes to its Library Network*, p. 1 (February, 2008).

EPA thus failed to follow its own guidance and failed to perform cost benefit analysis before taking actions with the goal of reducing costs. GAO also found that EPA hindered its transition by failing to develop a plan to communicate the reorganizations to the public and its staff. Finally, EPA may have violated federal property management regulations for disposal or dispersal of library materials by failing to make a written determination that property had "no value" before discarding it. Without such a determination, regulations require that agencies report surplus property to the General Services Administration. The end result of EPA's hasty reorganization may have been reduced benefits at comparable costs.

I, of course, support any effort to provide superior service at a lower cost. EPA has not, however, demonstrated either that service was not impaired or that costs were in fact lowered. The motivation to reduce costs is not cost effective when coupled with hurried analysis and rushed execution. GAO has provided a detailed analysis of EPA's reorganization. I urge EPA to properly conduct this cost-benefit analysis and ensure continued access to an important resource.