

Department of the Interior
DEPARTMENTAL MANUAL

Part 516 National Environmental
Policy Act of 1969

Environmental Quality

Chapter 3

Environmental Assessments

516 DM 3.1

3.1 Purpose. This Chapter provides supplementary instructions for implementing those portions of the CEQ regulations pertaining to environmental assessments (EA).

3.2 When to Prepare (1501.3).

- A. An EA will be prepared for all actions, except those covered by a categorical exclusion, covered sufficiently by an earlier environmental document, or for those actions for which a decision has already been made to prepare an EIS. The purpose of such an EA is to allow the responsible official to determine whether to prepare an EIS.
- B. In addition, an EA may be prepared on any action at any time in order to assist in planning and decision making.

3.3 Public Involvement.

- A. Public notification must be provided and, where appropriate, the public involved in the EA process (1506.6).
- B. The scoping process may be applied to an EA (1501.7).

3.4 Content.

- A. At a minimum, an EA will include brief discussions of the need for the proposal, of alternatives as required by Section 102(2)(E) of NEPA, of the environmental impacts of the proposed action and such alternatives, and a listing of agencies and persons consulted (1508.9(b)).
- B. In addition, an EA may be expanded to describe the proposal, a broader range of alternatives, and proposed mitigation measures if this facilitates planning and decision making.
- C. The level of detail and depth of impact analysis should normally be limited to that needed to determine whether there are significant environmental effects.
- D. An EA will contain objective analyses which support its environmental impact conclusions. It will not, in and of itself, conclude whether or not an EIS will be prepared. This conclusion will be made upon review of the EA by the responsible official and documented in either a NOI or FONSI.

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3.5 Format.

- A. An EA may be prepared in any format useful to facilitate planning and decision making.
- B. An EA may be combined with any other planning or decision making document; however, that portion which analyzes the environmental impacts of the proposal and alternatives will be clearly and separately identified and not spread throughout or interwoven into other sections of the document.

3.6 Adoption.

- A. An EA prepared for a proposal before the Department by another agency, entity or person, including an applicant, may be adopted if, upon independent evaluation by the responsible official, it is found to comply with this Chapter and relevant provisions of the CEQ regulations.
- B. When appropriate and efficient, a responsible official may augment such an EA when it is essentially but not entirely in compliance in order to make it so.
- C. If such an EA or augmented EA is adopted, the responsible official must prepare his/her own N01 or FONSI which also acknowledges the origin of the EA and takes full responsibility for its scope and content.

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