

Environmental Protection Agency

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time for public response; generally this should not be less than 30 days.

(d) *Public consultation.* For the purposes of this part, “public consultation” means an exchange of views between governmental agencies and interested or affected persons and organizations in order to meet the objectives set forth in § 25.3. Requirements for three common forms of public consultation (public hearings, public meetings, and advisory groups) are set forth in §§ 25.5, 25.6, and 25.7. Other less formal consultation mechanisms may include but are not limited to review groups, ad hoc committees, task forces, workshops, seminars and informal personal communications with individuals and groups. Public consultation must be preceded by timely distribution of information and must occur sufficiently in advance of decision-making to allow the agency to assimilate public views into agency action. EPA, State, interstate, and substate agencies shall provide for early and continuing public consultation in any significant action covered by this part. Merely conferring with the public after an agency decision does not meet this requirement. In addition to holding hearings and meetings as specifically required in this chapter, a hearing or meeting shall be held if EPA, the State, interstate, or substate agency determines that there is significant public interest or that a hearing or meeting would be useful.

(e) *Public information concerning legal proceedings.* EPA, State, interstate, and substate agencies shall provide full and open information on legal proceedings to the extent not inconsistent with court requirements, and where such disclosure would not prejudice the conduct of the litigation. EPA actions with regard to affording opportunities for public comment before the Department of Justice consents to a proposed judgment in an action to enjoin discharges of pollutants into the environment shall be consistent with the Statement of Policy issued by the Department of Justice (see title 28, CFR, chapter 1, § 50.7).

§ 25.5 Public hearings.

(a) *Applicability.* Any non-adjudicatory public hearing, whether manda-

tory or discretionary, under the three Acts shall meet the following minimum requirements. These requirements are subordinate to any more stringent requirements found elsewhere in this chapter or otherwise imposed by EPA, State, interstate, or substate agencies. Procedures developed for adjudicatory hearings required by this chapter shall be consistent with the public participation objectives of this part, to the extent practicable.

(b) *Notice.* A notice of each hearing shall be well publicized, and shall also be mailed to the appropriate portions of the list of interested and affected parties required by § 25.4(b)(5). Except as otherwise specifically provided elsewhere in this chapter, these actions must occur at least 45 days prior to the date of the hearing. However, where EPA determines that there are no substantial documents which must be reviewed for effective hearing participation and that there are no complex or controversial matters to be addressed by the hearing, the notice requirement may be reduced to no less than 30 days. EPA may further reduce or waive the hearing notice requirement in emergency situations where EPA determines that there is an imminent danger to public health. To the extent not duplicative, the agency holding the hearing shall also provide informal notice to all interested persons or organizations that request it. The notice shall identify the matters to be discussed at the hearing and shall include or be accompanied by a discussion of the agency’s tentative determination on major issues (if any), information on the availability of a bibliography of relevant materials (if deemed appropriate), and procedures for obtaining further information. Reports, documents and data relevant to the discussion at the public hearing shall be available to the public at least 30 days before the hearing. Earlier availability of materials relevant to the hearing will further assist public participation and is encouraged where possible.

(c) *Locations and time.* Hearings must be held at times and places which, to the maximum extent feasible, facilitate attendance by the public. Accessibility of public transportation, and use of evening and weekend hearings,

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should be considered. In the case of actions with Statewide interest, holding more than one hearing should be considered.

(d) *Scheduling presentations.* The agency holding the hearing shall schedule witnesses in advance, when necessary, to ensure maximum participation and allotment of adequate time for all speakers. However, the agency shall reserve some time for unscheduled testimony and may consider reserving blocks of time for major categories of witnesses.

(e) *Conduct of hearing.* The agency holding the hearing shall inform the audience of the issues involved in the decision to be made, the considerations the agency will take into account, the agency's tentative determinations (if any), and the information which is particularly solicited from the public. The agency should consider allowing a question and answer period. Procedures shall not unduly inhibit free expression of views (for example, by onerous written statement requirements or qualification of witnesses beyond minimum identification).

(f) *Record.* The agency holding the hearing shall prepare a transcript, recording or other complete record of public hearing proceedings and make it available at no more than cost to anyone who requests it. A copy of the record shall be available for public review.

§ 25.6 Public meetings.

Public meetings are any assemblies or gathering, (such as conferences, informational sessions, seminars, workshops, or other activities) which the responsible agency intends to be open to anyone wishing to attend. Public meetings are less formal than public hearings. They do not require formal presentations, scheduling of presentations and a record of proceedings. The requirements of § 25.5 (b) and (c) are applicable to public meetings, except that the agency holding the meeting may reduce the notice to not less than 30 days if there is good reason that longer notice cannot be provided.

§ 25.7 Advisory groups.

(a) *Applicability.* The requirements of this section on advisory groups shall be

met whenever provisions of this chapter require use of an advisory group by State, interstate, or substate agencies involved in activities supported by EPA financial assistance under any of the three Acts.

(b) *Role.* Primary responsibility for decision-making in environmental programs is vested by law in the elected and appointed officials who serve on public bodies and agencies at various levels of government. However, all segments of the public must have the opportunity to participate in environmental quality planning. Accordingly, where EPA identifies a need for continued attention of an informed core group of citizens in relation to activities conducted with EPA financial assistance, program regulations elsewhere in this chapter will require an advisory group to be appointed by the financially assisted agency. Such advisory groups will not be the sole mechanism for public participation, but will complement other mechanisms. They are intended to assist elected or appointed officials with final decision-making responsibility by making recommendations to such officials on important issues. In addition, advisory groups should foster a constructive interchange among the various interests present on the group and enhance the prospect of community acceptance of agency action.

(c) *Membership.* (1) The agency receiving financial assistance shall assure that the advisory group reflects a balance of interests in the affected area. In order to meet this requirement, the assisted agency shall take positive action, in accordance with paragraph (c)(3) of this section, to establish an advisory group which consists of substantially equivalent proportions of the following four groups:

(i) *Private citizens.* No person may be included in this portion of the advisory group who is likely to incur a financial gain or loss greater than that of an average homeowner, taxpayer or consumer as a result of any action likely to be taken by the assisted agency.

(ii) *Representatives of public interest groups.* A "public interest group" is an organization which reflects a general civic, social, recreational, environmental or public health perspective in