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OPENING OF UNEP/IRS NATIONAL FOCAL POINT

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U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
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U.S. NATIONAL FOCAL POINT

for

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM INTERNATIONAL REFERRAL SYSTEM

(UNEP / IRS)

SPEECHES AT THE OPENING OF THE U. S. NATIONAL FOCAL POINT

October 6, 1975

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE NOAA
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Master of Ceremonies, Fitzhugh Green, Associate Administrator for International Activities, Environmental Protection Agency.

SPEECHES AT THE OPENING OF THE U. S. NATIONAL FOCAL POINT

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"Since Stockholm"

by

RUSSELL E. TRAIN
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency

Like other chairmen of national delegations to the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972, I have been waiting impatiently to see practical, down-to-earth results.

Our impatience is finally being rewarded! Today marks the beginning of the U.S. portion of an extremely useful UN Environment program—the International Referral System—or IRS. This is the first practical activity, stemming from Stockholm, to reach the final stages of completion. As the U.S. National Focal Point for IRS, EPA has a chance now to actively contribute to a significant world-wide follow-through after Stockholm.

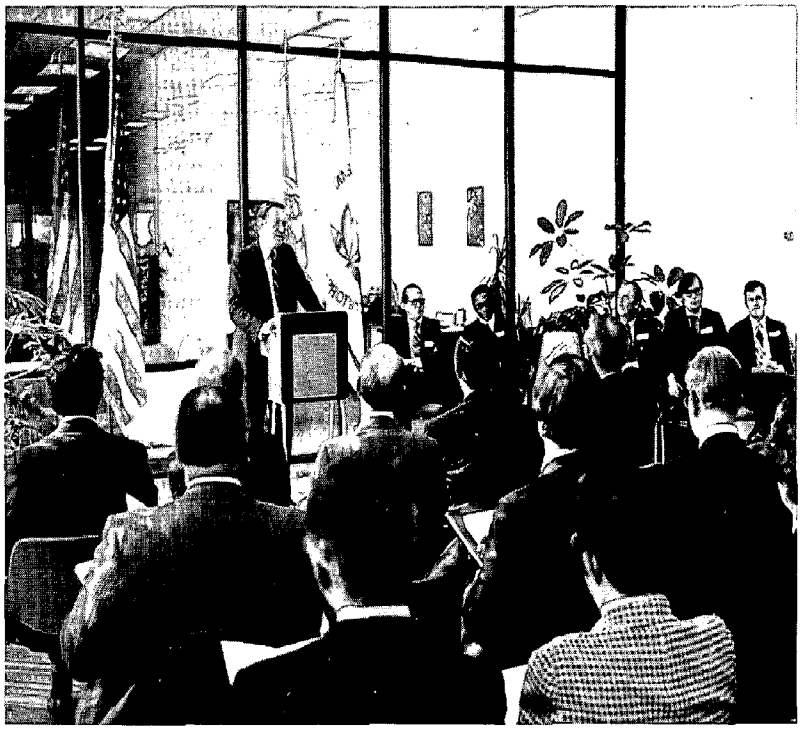
You will be hearing from Mr. Al Alm in detail as to how our National Focal Point program will operate.

We have learned since Stockholm how important it is to seek international cooperation in our efforts to protect our own eco-system. Like children growing up in different families, national programs for protecting the environment are advancing at different rates and different directions. This means that almost any country may have one research program, or control device or even unusual environmental situation which other countries could usefully know about.

No nation should have to do environmental research already completed by another or live in ignorance of control technology developed by another. For this very reason we try to keep in constant touch with our "opposite number" agencies all over the world, not to mention the environmental division of international organizations—particularly OECD, NATO, and the Common Market, as well as the United Nations.

IRS will serve to speed and spread the news of existing and newly acquired data. It will help all UN members to build more quickly and efficiently their own environmental protection mechanism.

UN members are moving with fairly commendable speed to implement other positive actions approved at Stockholm.



Russell E. Train, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency.

The first was to establish the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) as a permanent Specialized Agency of the UN. This was done at the UN General Assembly in the fall of 1972. Second, the recommendation that delegations persuade their countries to act at the national level has also brought a good response. Whereas in 1970 our EPA was the first one of its kind announced in the world, there are now some 50 roughly similar organizations in other countries.

I am happy to report that we have established excellent and useful relationships with most of these other EPAs. In fact, thanks to Dolores Gregory and Sarah Kadec there is a daily exchange of documents on respective developments of other national environmental organizations and our own. These exchanges are recorded in our monthly document "Summaries of Foreign Government Reports."

Additionally, since the Stockholm Conference, it has become commonplace to incorporate environmental considerations in development programs. For example, the World Bank will not approve a capital-intensive project that does not have built-in safeguards in terms of environmental impact. As you recall, Mr. McNamara, President of the World Bank, said at Stockholm that the difference in cost between an environmentally sound project and one without any safeguards is negligible.

Many developing nations now wish to establish environmental protection machinery as they industrialize their economy. They have sought and received support to this end from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). EPA has provided scores of experts for varying periods to assist these nations, and the UNDP and the World Health Organization (WHO) have contributed resources for this purpose. We wish we had more human resources to offer, but our ability to participate is, of course, limited by our own national commitments and requirements. I personally would like to see the U.S. Agency for International Development take on this kind of program and greatly expand what EPA has begun.

Meanwhile, the U.S., and EPA in particular, will continue to assist other nations by providing expertise and information, or participating in seminars to support the UNEP and other multinational environmental efforts.

We are proud to work with other nations as the spirit of Stockholm continues to inspire mankind to save its biosphere. I must say I am also pleased that many of our joint activities with other nations provide EPA with answers to some of our knottiest problems. I am confident that IRS will spread more answers to more EPAs everywhere.

"United Nations Environment Program"

by

NOEL J. BROWN
Senior Liaison Officer
United Nations Environment Program

Ladies and Gentlemen—Distinguished colleagues

On behalf of the Executive Director and the United Nations Environment Program, I would like to say how very pleased we are to be associated with this event today.

The INAUGURATION OF THIS NATIONAL COMPONENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL REFERRAL SYSTEM is a matter to which we at the United Nations Environment Program attach particular significance and for which we feel a sense of genuine fulfillment and pride—which I believe understandable.

From the earliest stages, the International Referral System has always received strong support from the United States—which was one of the first countries to identify and mobilize major resources in support of the system. Through the PROGRAM being launched today, we look forward to the continuing support of the United States in this vital information area. It is our hope also that this National Registry of Sources will serve as a working model of the focal point concept and help train managers in its design, operation and use.

As more national components like this one are established, I believe we will see emerging one of the most unique and perhaps most widely used systems of the United Nations environment community.

In essence, the IRS is designed to act as a dynamic mechanism to encourage, on an organized and systematic basis, the interchange of environmental information and environmental education programs at all levels.

As such, it is a system designed to put the user in contact with sources of information and, more importantly, to develop a relationship of encouragement between the user and the source as well as among the various elements of the referral program. In this connection, we foresee a user community that is likely to be very broad indeed and will undoubtedly include—ADMINISTRATORS, LEGISLATORS, SCIENTI-

Noel Brown, Senior Liaison Officer, United Nations Environment Program.

FIC AND TECHNICAL PRACTITIONERS, PLANNERS, TEACHERS, CITIZENS, JOURNALISTS AS WELL AS TECHNICALLY TRAINED WORKERS IN GOVERNMENT OR INDUSTRY INVOLVED IN THE SOLVING OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS.

Moreover, as environmental problems cannot be solved in isolation, one can easily foresee the user list rapidly intersecting many other disciplines and programs . . . and most certainly, many components of the United Nations system itself.

For example, one of the most significant developments within the United Nations since Stockholm is what might be termed—the tendency toward action planning at the global level. Here, one simply has to note that characteristic of all the major conferences of the last few years—Population and Food of 1974, Raw Materials and Development—1975, HABITAT—1976, Water and Desertification Conference—1977—are ACTION PLANS. Within these plans, provisions are generally made for monitoring mechanisms to serve as EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS, including provisions for the creation of global data bases as a prime requirement of sound policy making. Yet, with the exception of the United Nations Environment Program, none of the plans established so far makes any provision for referral services or information exchange system on a scale comparable to that of the IRS. There can be little doubt, therefore, that sooner or later the IRS will be called upon to play a supportive role in the implementation of these action plans.

At the same time, it should be recognized that UNEP itself is likely to be a major user in view of the potential of IRS as a GENERALIZED "INVENTORY-TAKING FACILITY", and our responsibility to prepare periodically "STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT REPORTS" within the framework of EARTHWATCH. To be useful, however, any such reports will require data of a high degree of accuracy and authority which, through its comparative character and cross-verification capabilities, IRS is in a position to provide.

But despite the promise of IRS and its importance in environmental problem-solving, there are some who have become IMPATIENT with the slow pace with which it has evolved, and others who cite this as proof of a slackening of the momentum of Stockholm and the lack of serious commitment on the part of Governments to the realization of the EARTHWATCH Program. EARTHWATCH, after all, has come to be considered as the centerpiece of the United Nations Environment System and the index of the Program's viability. Consequently, the progress of the Program tends to be measured in terms of EARTHWATCH capabilities and activities.

Such judgements, understandable as they are, may not fully appreciate the magnitude of the task at hand and the complexity of the system now coming into being. Moreover, it is an established fact that within international organizations it takes anywhere from three to five years to develop information programmes of the quality and reliability for the kind of scientific research and uses envisaged under IRS—more especially so, since the question of INTER-COMPARABILITY OF DATA IS OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE.

On the other hand, we in UNEP have reason to feel encouraged—our own administrative mechanism has undergone a major overhaul and our capacity for organization and management of EARTHWATCH has been greatly enhanced. More importantly, however, is the fact that many Governments, which hitherto have either been hostile or indifferent to the concept of EARTHWATCH and IRS, are increasingly displaying interest in its operation, and their participation is being energetically encouraged.

Presently, our network of national partners numbers 54, and we hope that this number will increase rapidly. Certainly, leadership by the United States in this area could go a long way towards accelerating that process.

To be fully effective, however, IRS must move beyond the network of national focal points to that of REGIONAL AND EVEN SECTORAL PARTNERSHIP—and here again the trends are quite encouraging.

Within the economic regions, certain of the Economic Commissions have expressed interest in being associated—and in order to stimulate and encourage regional interest, the United Nations Environment Program will be sponsoring a series of Regional Seminars intended to serve as a forum for intensive discussions on management issues relating to the planning and operation of focal points. The first of these was held at the end of September in Nairobi for East Africa and West Asia. A second is planned for Geneva at the end of October for North America and West Europe for which both the United States and Canada are providing expert support. Later seminars have also been planned for West Africa, Latin America, East Asia, East Europe, etc., and should average about one every 45 days.

When fully operational, the IRS will thus add an important management tool to the international system, where issues of cause and effect relationships are assuming increasingly ominous proportions. Moreover, the world can ill-afford the pattern of "DISCOVERY BY ACCIDENT", as we have in the case of the ozone-depletion and the risk that we may

have transgressed the outer limits in many areas vital to our survival. Just as the environment cannot be nationalized, its management can no longer be a matter of chance disclosures nor can the existence of vital data be considered the exclusive possession of national Governments. In this connection, IRS potential for information-sharing is thus a welcome development.

No system, no matter how well designed and efficient in its operation, can hope to meet the information needs of the world community without addressing itself to the special information problems of the Third World and inability of some of its members to fully participate in a global information system. One of the major challenges facing UNEP is to help develop the capacities of emerging countries to develop and manage national environmental information systems—particularly those countries lacking the basic framework for information collecting and processing.

FOCAL POINT COLLEAGUES—at the United Nations today, the Developing Countries have intensified their demand for a more effective participant role in their call for a new international economic order and suddenly the system seems to be responding, though much difficult work lies ahead. The best order, however, will endure only to the degree that it satisfies basic human needs and enhances the quality of "life for all".

Without serious regard for the environment, a life of quality, as called for in the New International Economic Order, is likely to be a short-lived phenomenon. It is our hope that many of the critical decisions yet to be made will reflect environmental preservation as crucial to survival of human well-being—and here access to sound data is of central importance.

It is clear, however, that as we attempt to assess conflicting global trends, the basic challenge remains the management of the world's first truly technological civilization. For, our technological order, barely two hundred years old, has modified our existence more profoundly than any other human activity in the several millenia of man's existence. Our culture seems to have lost the capacity to control technological dynamics. As a matter of fact, one of the central factors of the technological order is the absence of interior control.

Some writers like Philip Rieff go so far as to suggest that "TECHNOLOGY IN ITS VERY PRINCIPLE IS THE ABSENCE OF INTERIOR CONTROL" and that the technological ethos simply demands that "what can be done must be done".

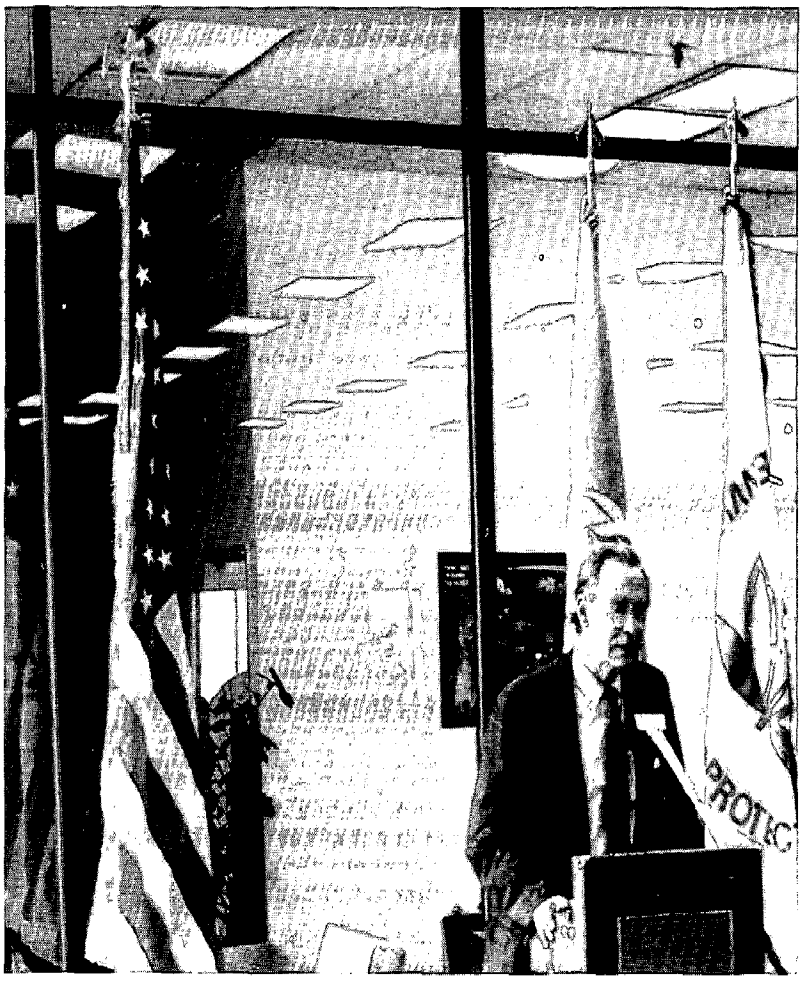
There are some who argue that man is not intelligent enough to survive his present crisis—he has built a world so complex with so many interacting factors, that the human mind can no longer see its way through the maze to discern the ultimate effects of decisions and actions taken today.

Others, like Jay W. Forestors, suggest that the evolutionary processes had not given us the mental skill needed to properly interpret that dynamic behaviour of the system of which we have now become a part —hence the use of simulators and mathematical models.

It is becoming increasingly obvious, however, that what is needed is a technique that could help the world leaders assess the long-term effects of their decisions on the physical and social environments BEFORE such decisions are made. This would involve a fundamentally new approach to societal decision-making.

It would thus seem, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, that what is being suggested is a style of policy and action whereby long-term considerations must become the premise of all decisions and a central operating procedure. This would mean consideration of a significantly longer time horizon than the five years which is customary, as well as better methods of evaluating the full consequences of decisions which affect both the physical and social environment—and here the role of IRS should become clearly manifest.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN—IRS is not a magic formula, but another significant step in the management of the planet man calls home.



Christian Herter, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environmental and Population Affairs, State Department.

"State Department's Role"

by

CHRISTIAN HERTER, JR.
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environmental and Population Affairs
State Department

Thank you very much. After that elaborate introduction, for which I thank you, there is very really little, I think, needs to be said. You got a full program getting into the substance of this operation. And after what Noel Brown has described to you, there is very little left to be said.

From the point of view of the State Department, I'd just like to make two very brief comments. The first is that at the Stockholm Conference, as Russ Train has explained, there was this continuous demand to know by people of the conference: What was going on in the world environment? Where could one find out information about it? Why didn't the scientist know more? How could we work out a system whereby we could learn more about what is happening in the environment and through which the results of the learning could be made available to all countries? This was the theme that pervaded.

Remember this was only about four years ago. As a matter of fact, it was less than that. Stockholm was three years ago. And at that time, many countries in the world did not even know what the word environment was.

But I think we've come an awfully long way since then, at least in terms of awareness. For the first time through the IRS Focal Point systems as it appears in the United Nations Environment Program, we are beginning to put together the threads here. This is what you fellows have done. You are meeting the first demand for scientific information, and secondly, the demand for very practical information—as to how and what has been done elsewhere.

I can remember just a simple old question and I use these purely as examples, but if a tropical nation at a semi-developed level wants to find out what kind of sewage system, let's say, it can use, given its climate, that is within its means, obviously a very sophisticated industrial state won't be much help to it. How does it find out what another tropical nation of like resources has done about this problem? One of our theories and hopes all along is that we would have a mechanism to begin providing some of the answers not only in terms of the research

involved, and the more esthetic aspects of environmental learning, but very practical useful information that some of the developing countries can't get elsewhere and don't even know where to start looking for it. Now this demand has been increasing as time has gone on since Stockholm. On the other side, the supply, it seems extraordinary to me the amount of information that there is but nobody knows where it is. Not only are we talking about government but all levels of government —federal, state, and local—in this country. We are also talking about the extensive work going on in universities, in this area and out in industry. The industrialists themselves particularly those industries that have the major problems of an environmental nature, have done a tremendous amount of research and have a great deal of practical experience. At any one time, it's almost impossible to tell where this information is, who do you get hold of for assistance, how do you find out about it. You add to what we know in this country, with its enormous variety and great wealth of experience, the knowledge of other countries, the total is vast. All countries have some knowledge, whether they be developed countries dealing with environmental problems, such as the UK, Germany, Soviet Union, or the developing countries.

There is a vast amount of environmental information. I think you yourselves know that all you have to do is take a look at the EPA library to find out. There is also a vast amount to be learned too, but it is not focused in any one place, and nobody knows how to get at it. So that it seems to me today is the beginning of one half or one part of pulling together a structure whereby it will be possible for those who want to find something out that would help their country deal with their problems, where they can find out what information there is in the world that is relevant to their own experience.

The second part is obviously the question of will it work and how to make it work. We've set up the structure and as Noel Brown pointed out I think the U.S. is the first to have a focal point and I'd like to add my congratulations to those of Mr. Green's to the ladies who have done so much about pulling this together. I understand that there is now a five-man team here in EPA and this becomes the National Focal Point. The real challenge now is to get similar focal points and to have somebody realize that the system is some help to them so that they will use it. I dare say this is going to take some time too. The whole concept of the International Referral System is part of Earthwatch. It is the first program of Earthwatch that has actually gotten into action and we in the Department are obviously very, very pleased.

Now the second point I mentioned, is how come EPA happens to be the focal point for the system in the U.S. The State Department was asked to select the focal point and I might say we've had an awfully hard time trying to figure out what agency to use. We've tried all sorts of agencies. We have been thinking about this thing and our problem with the Environmental Protection Agency was its self sufficiency. As you know, the focal point is supposed to reach out to other agencies, industries, the academic establishment, and other non-governmental organizations, all of which will take a period of time, but our experience with EPA was that they knew so much about so many subjects, we did not feel that they'd ever go beyond their own resources and that we would have no contacts outside. I'm saying this facetiously, but nevertheless this is one great worry. Well it wasn't a very hard problem in truth. EPA was the perfect natural place to have this entire system operate in this country. With its research, with its very practical experience, with its regional offices all over the country, and with its growing contacts both with the academic community, and we were delighted, in fact, it was set up here, that it is operating.

Mr. Alm is going to talk about the mechanics of it. And we are extremely pleased in the totality of our international effort to see it established here.

Thank you very much and I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words.

"EPA's Role as National Focal Point"

by

ALVIN ALM
Assistant Administrator for Planning and Management
Environmental Protection Agency

Environmental quality control is extraordinarily complex, requiring a wide range of information. Standard setting, problem definition, project management involve a range of disciplines—biology, hydrology, economics, technology and so on.

There is, we know, a vast store of information in all these fields. Yet access is often limited by lack of awareness on the part of users of information sources and lack of skills in retrieving the information.

The International Referral System is viewed as an opportunity not only to trade information among countries of the world but also to enhance national referral services. EPA, designated National Focal Point for the United States, has committed significant manpower and financial resources to the operation with expectations of better serving the needs of environmental information users in the private sector as well as government.

The National Focal Point, under the directorship of William Bennett, is administratively under the EPA Library Systems Branch headed by Sarah Kadec.

In its lead agency role, EPA has management responsibility for:

—inventory of U.S. organizations which will participate in the IRS.

—national directory of information sources to be included in the IRS International Directory.

—referral service to respond to requests from IRS users both within the U.S. and from other countries.

As National Focal Point, EPA is also responsible for liaison with the UNEP/IRS Central Unit in Nairobi and with other countries on matters related to national focal point management.

Success will depend upon active cooperation of all groups represented here today—government, universities, business and industry, professional associations, citizens groups and other non profit organizations. EPA invites all of you to actively participate in this important international endeavor.

Alvin L. Alm, Assistant Administrator for Planning and Management, Environmental Protection Agency.

James T. Clarke, Assistant Secretary—Management, Department of Interior.

"Role of Other Agencies — Importance of Participation"

by

JAMES T. CLARKE
Assistant Secretary — Management
Department of Interior

It is a pleasure for me, both personally and from an agency standpoint, to participate today. The general subject matter has been thoroughly discussed by the prior speakers. As a result, I'd like to focus on several specific areas that have not been touched.

One of the things that has most impressed me during the three years that I have been in my present job is the difficulty in identifying the rich lodes of information which frequently lie hidden within the various Federal agencies.

I had occasion to journey to Sioux Falls, a very delightful town in South Dakota. It is also the home for the EROS Data Center—The center, a part of the Geological Survey, is among other things a huge computer processing facility. It acquires, processes and disseminates environmental information mostly from two NASA satellites which are currently rotating around the earth about 14 times a day, as well as some other NASA research aircraft. These various scanning devices, use regular photography and various other kinds of rather exotic techniques.

You might be interested to know that there are presently ground stations around the world which have the capability of acquiring directly the data output from these satellites, but most of it is processed by the Data Center.

Looking at the wealth of information which this program was generating, I asked the program managers what were their most serious problems. Well, they said they had overcome most of the technical difficulties. Like all programs, they had their funding problems. But the thing that was of most concern was getting the information collected to potential users. I felt that it was quite significant that their assessment of their most severe problem was the difficulty of making users aware that this considerable environmental information was available. And second, to get the people who were aware of it to become more sophisticated in its application.

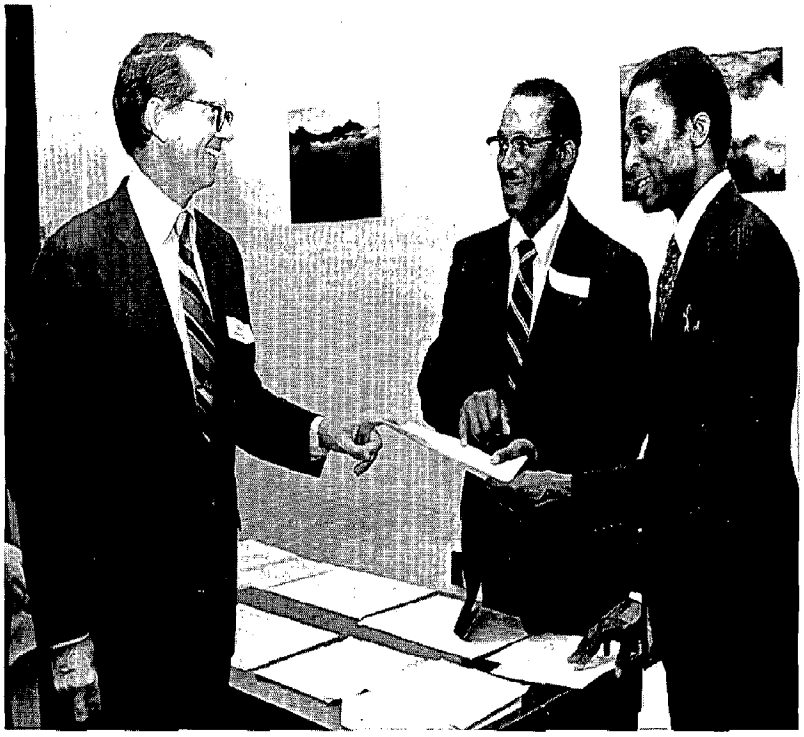
Now, I'm certain that Interior is no exception when it comes to current strains on the budget. Each new demand strains the manpower and resources that we have. We look very critically at any participation in any program, especially one that is outside our department. We have looked at this particular one. We're impressed with its utility for us as an individual agency, and we're prepared to participate fully.

I might add at this point that one of the things we're particularly sensitive to is the problem of collecting environmental data and the associated technical analysis. This sensitivity springs from the many environmental impact statements which we have to prepare. These statements are time consuming and demanding of objective data and analysis. We know we don't have a corner on the market in terms of this capability, but we're optimistic that programs of this nature will assist us greatly.

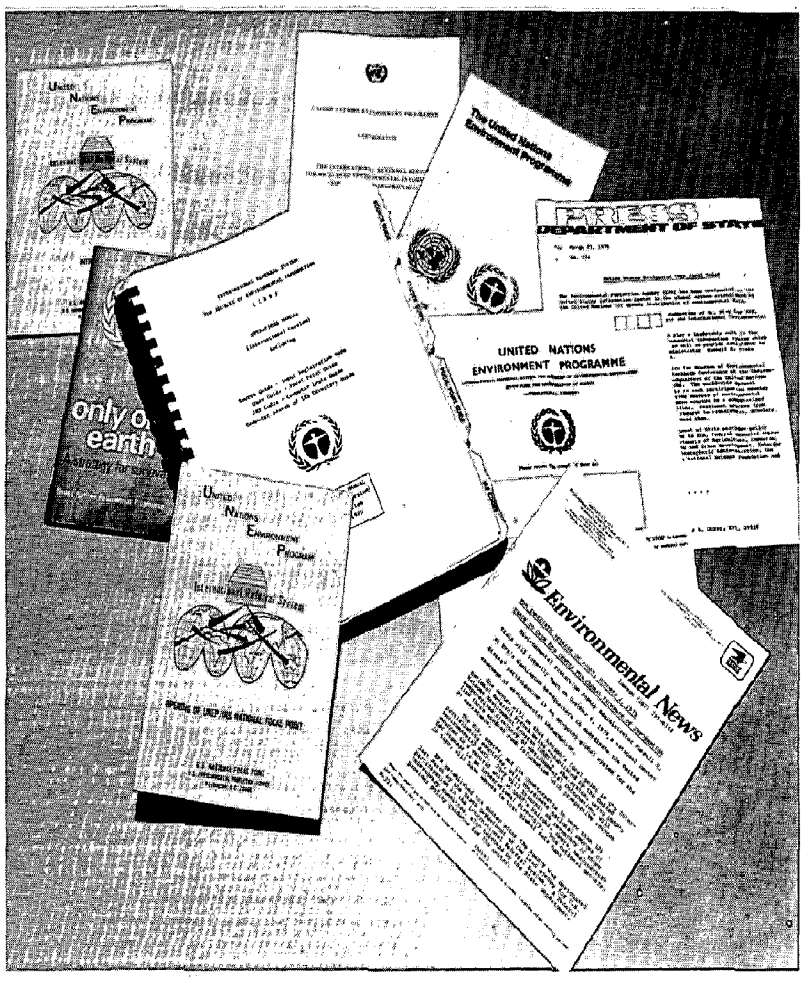
We've already hooked in about fifty of our environmental data programs into the U.S. National Focal Point. We expect that other program managers will soon join. We're going to encourage them to do so.

As an old data processor, I still remember the term "GIGO." It is a term that translates—*garbage-in—garbage-out.* The purpose of memtioning the term here is that the Focal Point structure which has been put in place internationally and within this country is just that: its a structure. And its going to be up to the participating agencies to make sure that the kind of information which goes in is useful to the users when it comes out.

We're going to fully support the Environmental Protection Agency in this effort and expect to work cooperatively with other governmental agencies. And we're prepared to encourage the participation in and use of this system. We hope you will do the same. Thank you very much.



Demonstration of the International Referral System—William W. Bennett, Director of the U. S. National Focal Point (center) explaining operational procedures to Fitzhugh Green (left) and Noel Brown (right).



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