

What do you think are the key environmental challenges which will impact the EPA in the future?

Global warming and the increased threat posed to it through the use and leakage of synthetic greenhouse gases (SGG) will be one of the key environmental issues facing the EPA in the future. Currently there are regulations that cover the negative affect that substances can have in relation to land, air and water. The issue is that SGG can have a far greater affect than localised contamination but are seemingly forgotten in the regulatory landscape. The EPA has until now coped with 'old industrial pollutants' but has largely ignored 'new industrial pollutants' in the guise of SGG. An example of a synthetic greenhouse gas that is largely unregulated is sulfur hexafluoride (SF6) which has a global warming potential of 23,900 times greater than that of carbon. This gas is mainly used in Victoria in high voltage switchgear by electricity distributers in increasing amounts. The only legislation covering its use is the Commonwealth Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management Act 1989 which prohibits the deliberate escape of SF6. At this point in time in Victoria:

- There is no licence required to operate a business to decommission SF6 bottles and plant to remove the gas (and therefore no checks and oversight)
- No transport licencing or waste transport certificates required for SF6 and so no tracking of its movement
- No notification required of SF6 leaks due to plant breakdowns and malfunctions (although this may have long term detrimental outcomes in the environment)
- Maintenance of SF6 filled equipment is not reportable or audited so leaks may exist for substantial periods of time before being rectified
- No reporting of the organisation and/ or state wide SF6 inventory which therefore reduces the checks and oversight that there should be in regard to a gas that has such a high global warming potential.

The long term detrimental global warming implications in regard to land, air and water quality brought about by the poor management of SGG in Victoria could very well affect all people residing in the state. In a conscious risk based environment a much higher level of control must be exercised over such gasses and their handing and use in industry. This in turn can give industry a degree of certainty that, for example, providers of services such as disposal of SGG filled plant are under regulatory control to do the right thing.

What aspects of the EPA's work do you value and wish to preserve in the future?

No Answer

How can the EPA effectively work in partnership with other government agencies to meet the environmental challenges of the future?

No Answer

How can the EPA's role in safeguarding the community against the health impacts of pollution be clarified or strengthened?

No Answer

How could statutory frameworks more effectively prevent future environmental risks and land use conflicts?

The EPA should look at the UK and the requirements for the building industry to recycle the majority of their waste. This not only reduces the threat to the environment with precious resources not going to landfill (which in itself has environmental risk) but can instead foster new industries in recycling and upcycling of what was a waste material.

What role should the EPA play in emergency management?

No Answer

How can the EPA better identify and, where necessary, address problems that are the result of past activity?

The EPA could create a portal where industry could get access to innovative solutions to contamination without the costly process of engaging consultants.

What role should the EPA play in improving environmental outcomes beyond those necessary to safeguard human health?

No Answer

What role should the EPA play in reducing greenhouse gas emissions?

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How do you see environmental justice being applied to the work of the EPA?

No Answer

What can we adopt from other regulators and regulatory models to implement best-practice approaches and ensure that the EPA can rise to key future challenges?

No Answer

Are there any other issues relevant to the Terms of Reference that you would like to raise?

No Answer

What can the EPA do to avoid potential future problems?

No Answer