

## **The National Environmental Policy Act**

**Purpose:** The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to integrate environmental values into their decision-making processes by considering the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and reasonable alternatives to those actions.

**Review Process:** The NEPA process consists of an evaluation of the environmental effects of a federal undertaking including its alternatives. There are three types of analysis. The three types include: (1) categorical exclusion determination; (2) preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) and/or finding of no significant impact (FONSI); and (3) preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS).

1. An undertaking may be excluded from a detailed environmental analysis if it meets certain criteria, which a federal agency has previously determined as having no significant environmental impact. Many agencies have developed lists of actions, which are normally excluded from environmental evaluation under their NEPA regulations.
2. A federal agency prepares a written environmental assessment (EA) to determine whether a federal undertaking would significantly affect the environment. If the answer is no, the agency issues a finding of no significant impact (FONSI). The FONSI may address measures, which an agency will take to reduce potentially significant impacts.
3. If the EA determines that the environmental consequences of a proposed federal undertaking may be significant, an EIS is prepared. An EIS is a more detailed evaluation of the proposed action and alternatives. The public, other federal agencies and outside parties may provide input into the preparation of an EIS and then comment on the draft EIS when it is completed. If a federal agency anticipates that an undertaking may significantly impact the environment, or if a project is environmentally controversial, a federal agency may choose to prepare an EIS without having to first prepare an EA. After a final EIS is prepared and at the time of its decision, a federal agency will prepare a public record of its decision addressing how the finding of the EIS, including consideration of alternatives, were incorporated into the agency's decision-making process.

Go to: <https://ceq.doe.gov/> for a complete text of NEPA;

Go to: <https://www.epa.gov/nepa/national-environmental-policy-act-review-process> for NEPA requirements; and

Go to: <https://www.epa.gov/nepa/environmental-impact-statement-filing-guidance> for information about submitting an EIS.

**Note:** If a project is federally funded or requires federal authorization, an EA may be required.