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From: EPA Press Office
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Subject: EPA is Clearing Out the Agency's FOIA Backlog

EPA is Clearing Out the Agency's FOIA Backlog

WASHINGTON (November 21, 2017) - Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced that the Agency is on track to significantly reduce the backlog of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests received prior to 2017.

"We are committed to transparency," **said EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt.** "EPA staff have quickly responded to the challenge to clear the backlog of FOIAs that built up from the previous administration, all while continuing to respond to the large volume of incoming requests."

EPA's National FOIA Office and offices across the agency have been working hard to clear the backlog of FOIA requests that existed at the start of 2017. As of early October, 2017, EPA had 652 open FOIA requests that were submitted in prior years. As of today, the Agency is on track to provide responses to over 70 percent of those requests by the end of the calendar year.

"We have requests that are open from as far back as 2008," **said Steven Fine, EPA's acting chief information officer.** "EPA staff are finding ways to overcome a number of obstacles to complete the majority of the old requests by the end of December."

In addition to clearing the backlog from previous years, EPA continues to process incoming FOIA requests, to ensure the current administration is being open and transparent and to avoid unnecessary costs to the American taxpayer. For requests that cannot be completed by the end of the calendar year, the Agency is developing request-specific plans to ensure they are completed as early as possible.

"We are currently defending 41 FOIA lawsuits, which demonstrates that the public feels stronger about access to information than ever before," **said Kevin Minoli, EPA's acting general counsel.** "The effort of employees across EPA to systematically respond to the oldest FOIA requests and eliminate the backlog demonstrates the strength of our commitment to providing the public with access to information."

The National FOIA Office set targets, shared best practices, and worked together with the regions and programs to ensure that relevant information is shared with the public in ways that properly responded to each request. The National FOIA Office will also be developing a new webpage showing the progress of the backlog reduction effort, which will be found www.epa.gov/foia.

In fiscal year 2017 EPA received 11,493 FOIA requests, 995 more than the previous fiscal year. In that same period, EPA received 36 new FOIA lawsuits, compared to only 12 lawsuits in the previous year.

The numbers provided for pre-2017 FOIA requests do not include 34 pre-2017 requests received by EPA's Office of the Inspector General, which is an independent office within EPA.

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