
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD

FACTS

Date Started: 1978

Legislation

The SAB was created pursuant to the Environmental Research, Development, and Demonstration Authorization Act, 42 U.S.C. 4365. The SAB's charter is renewed every 2 years, last renewal on November 1, 2013.

Products/Deliverables

- Peer review reports of EPA documents
- Advisories when it has reviewed EPA works-in-progress
- Commentaries or more extensive original reports on topics deemed important to environmental protection

MISSION

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Science Advisory Board (SAB) is a scientific/technical advisory committee that provides independent advice and peer review to EPA's Administrator on scientific and technical aspects of environmental issues.

Congressional committees specified in Environmental Research, Development, and Demonstration Authorization Act (ERDDAA) may also ask the EPA to have the SAB provide scientific advice on a particular issue. The SAB reviews scientific issues, provides independent scientific and technical advice on EPA's major programs, and performs special assignments as requested by EPA officials.

The SAB Executive Committee described the SAB's mission as making "a positive difference in the production and use of science" at EPA.

BENEFITS AND USES OF FINDINGS

Environmental policies and regulations informed by the best available science.

Strengthen the scientific and technical base for the EPA's decisions.

Bring the most relevant science to the table to inform environmental decisions.

The SAB focuses on technical issues, not policy issues; risk assessment and engineering issues, not risk management decisions; the adequacy of the scientific foundation on which an EPA position (e.g., a regulatory standard) is built, not the position itself.

The SAB recognizes the EPA's need to make environmental policy, risk management, and regulatory decisions but does not advise the EPA on those decisions directly. Instead it limits its advice to the scientific and technical underpinnings on which those decisions rest.

SUBJECT AREAS

- 1) Adequacy/scientific basis of standards under the Clean Air Act, Federal Water Pollution Control Act, Clean Water Act, Resource Conservation & Recovery Act, Toxic Substances Control Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, & Liability Act;
- 2) Scientific/technical adequacy of EPA programs, guidelines, documents, methodologies, protocols and tests;
- 3) New or revised scientific criteria or standards for protection of human health & environment;
- 4) New info needs & quality of EPA plans/programs for R&D/ demonstration; and
- 5) the relative importance of various natural and anthropogenic pollution sources.

COMMITTEE

The SAB is composed of about 45 members. The number of members is adjusted as necessary to provide leadership to SAB committees and panels. Members are independent experts in the fields of science, engineering, economics, and other social sciences to provide a range of expertise required to assess the scientific and technical aspects of environmental issues.

Each year, the SAB publishes a Federal Register (FR) Notice announcing opportunities for the public to nominate candidate experts to serve on the SAB and some SAB committees. If additional expertise is needed to address an advisory topic, the SAB Staff Office publishes a FR Notice announcing formation of an ad hoc panel that reports to the SAB and invites the public to nominate candidates. The SAB Staff Office also solicits suggestions for candidates from SAB members and consultants.

After vetting nominated candidates with SAB leadership, the SAB Staff Office publishes a list of candidates and invites public comments on them. Expertise, knowledge and experience are the primary factors that determine whether an individual is invited to serve on the SAB or an SAB subgroup. Other selection criteria include: availability and willingness to serve, scientific credibility and impartiality, and skills working in committees and advisory panels.

OVERSIGHT

The EPA SAB is a federal advisory committee, subject to Federal Advisory Committee Act provisions. The SAB Staff Office:

- 1) Manages EPA requests for scientific and technical advice and peer review
- 2) Provides policy, technical and administrative assistance to the SAB in conducting meetings and preparing reports
- 3) Oversees formation of advisory committees and panels, ensuring that the needed breadth and depth of expertise and balanced points of view are achieved
- 4) Informs the public of committee advisory activities through Federal Register Notices, ensures that committees conduct advisory activities in public and provides the public with opportunities to provide input during the advisory process.

The Designated Federal Officer (DFO) is the point of contact for public questions about the SAB.

FUNDING SOURCES

Office of the EPA Administrator.

Q: What “triggers” a review?

A: Most SAB activities are responses to EPA requests for peer reviews or scientific and technical advice, submitted to the SAB Staff Office. Occasionally the SAB will also initiate a special study, with EPA’s support, to provide advice on an emerging issue or other important scientific subject.

Q: What are SAB “subcommittees”?

A: The SAB has 6 standing subcommittees: Drinking Water, Ecological Processes and Effects, Environmental Economics Advisory, Environmental Engineering, Exposure and Human Health, and Radiation Advisory Committees. EPA & SAB may also form temporary committees, panels, or workgroups for work consistent with the SAB charter. These groups report to the SAB but do not make decisions for it.

Q: How long does it take a product to be completed?

A: Timelines vary depending on the product being requested.

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