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FEMA CIO Guidance - Section 515 - Information Quality

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Overview:

Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government and Appropriation Act for FY 2001 (554) directs agencies to provide policy and procedural guidelines for ensuring the quality of information disseminated to the public. In the final guidelines issued on February 22, 2001, it states that Section 515 covers scientific, financial, or statistical information that has a substantial effect on public policy or business decisions.

This CIO guidance memorandum addresses the wide variety of information that FEMA disseminates. In addition to publications and Internet, FEMA uses a variety of media and dissemination techniques to distribute efficiently information to a wide and diverse audience. At the same time, the agency is committed to serve the public by disseminating information that meets OMB and FEMA standards for objectivity, utility, and integrity. The National Flood Insurance Program has already instituted requisite procedures for revising and amending flood insurance rate maps.

The Federal Government is the largest producer, collector, and disseminator of information in the United States. The free flow of information between the government and the public is essential to a democratic society. Government information is a means to assess the accountability of government, to manage the government's operations, to maintain the healthy performance of the economy, and to ensure that information has become a commodity in the marketplace.

Applicability and Scope:

The CIO guidance memorandum for information quality:

- Applies to all organizational elements in headquarters, regions, and field establishments. The CIO memorandum also applies to contractors or other outside parties, who produce information and documents under FEMA aegis.
- Covers any information that the agency initiates or sponsors for distribution to the public.
- Covers information prepared by an outside party to which the agency acknowledges an agreement or which the agency uses.
- Covers third-party release where agency officials review or approve the information for public release.
- Does not cover personal information that is received to carry out basic agency functions if this information is not disseminated to the public.

Responsibility:

The Chief Information Officer (CIO) serves as the designated official for compliance with S mandates. The Office of the Chief Information Officer shall oversee the administration of t for corrections to public information maintained and disseminated by FEMA.

Assistant Directors, Administrators, Regional Directors, and Office Directors are responsib

- Promulgating and maintaining information quality standards commensurate with th importance of the information developed, maintained, and disseminated.
- Replying promptly to public requests for correction of information alleged to be in e response shall be in a manner appropriate to the nature and extent of the complain
- Subjecting to peer review information products that are likely to influence public po alter private sector decisions.
- Verifying that influential scientific, financial, or statistical information is transparent ; replicable.

The Printing, Publications & Graphics Section shall maintain and expedite the updating of documents disseminated to the public. After October 1, 2002, any FEMA document that h found to contain erroneous information shall be notated as such in both print and electroni

References:

Office of Management and Budget, *Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, O Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Agencies*, 67 Federal Register February 22, 2002.

OMB Circular A-130, Management of Federal Information Resources, November 30, 2000

Clinger-Cohen Act (P.L. 104-106, Division E), 1996

Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35)

Objectives:

Promulgate policy and procedures that define the standards for official information develop maintained, and disseminated by FEMA in conformance with OMB guidelines and standar

Establish administrative mechanisms, including via electronic media, by which affected pa seek and obtain correction of official agency information alleged to be erroneous or fails to with OMB and FEMA standards.

Maintain accurate and complete account of the number and nature of complaints received agency regarding information quality or compliance with OMB guidelines.

Policy:

Official agency information shall be developed and disseminated in compliance with OMB standards for quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity.

The policy covers research or other studies, whose results may later be used or relied upo to promulgate regulations, standards, or program requirements.

Affected parties may seek and shall obtain prompt review and correction, if necessary, of information disseminated by FEMA that is alleged to be erroneous.

For confidentiality or national security reasons, FEMA officials may restrict the access to such information and methodology.

Information that FEMA issues to meet mission responsibilities, to justify possible regulator recommended actions, or to present the agency views shall be subject to public notice and opportunity for public comment.

Procedures:

Information disseminated to the public shall be documented as to the procedures, data, and methodology used to develop the information.

The documentation and transparency concerning the data and methods shall permit qualified parties to replicate the information or results.

Documentation shall be sufficient to allow application of the methods and processes as FEMA standards for the activities under study.

The level of documentation and the rigor of the reviews shall be commensurate with the importance of public policy, technologies, or sectors of the economy.

Official agency information, analyses, or findings shall be subject to external peer reviews independent, and objective evaluations of methods and original and supporting data.

Peer reviewers shall a) possess the necessary technical expertise, b) provide prior technical positions, and c) disclose sources of personal and institutional funding.

The guidelines may be waived for FEMA employees or contractors to present or publish research findings in academic or professional settings as long as appropriate disclaimers are attached. Disclaimers shall state the extent to which the findings may or may not represent the official position of the agency.

Timely information collected wholly or in part from information gathered outside the agency shall be disseminated if the public is aware of potential corrections or revisions.

Administrative procedures:

Requests for the correction of public information disseminated by FEMA shall be forwarded to the CIO.

The public shall be encouraged to submit requests for correction via the FEMA web site.

The current procedures for processing FEMA flood insurance rate map revisions and amendments shall define the performance measures for compliance with Section 515.

The applicants shall document how they are affected adversely by the inaccurate information.

Applicants shall receive prompt notification of the receipt of requests for correction.

Within 60 days, applicants shall be formally notified of the nature and probable resolution of requests for correction of public information, including the responsible office and procedure review used.

Applicants may appeal for reconsideration of the agency's decision.

To the extent feasible, appeals should be settled within 120 days.

As the FEMA designated official, the CIO may determine which information is exempt from information quality guidelines.

The CIO may decline to process frivolous or repeated requests for correction.

Reports:

FEMA shall report annually by January 1, to the Director of OMB the number and nature of complaints on information quality received by the agency during the previous fiscal year.

The report shall document how the complaints were resolved.

The CIO shall maintain the data and supporting documentation for the OMB report as well other administrative functions.

The report shall incorporate statistics regarding the requests for and resolution of flood insurance map revisions or amendments.

Definitions:

Government information covers books, papers, maps, machine-readable material, audio/visual production, and other documentary material. The definition covers electronic documents, CD-ROMs, or web pages. The criticality and legal stature of the information determine the qualitative standards that apply to specific types of information. The guidelines allow flexibility in management and administrative practices that support common sense and workable standards without imposing unnecessary costs.

Information quality encompasses the utility, objectivity, and integrity of the final product and the underlying methodology by which the data are created and maintained.

Influential means the scientific, financial, or statistical information disseminated by the agency produces a substantial impact on important public policy or alters significantly the economic or private sector decisions. Influential may be defined as imposing economic costs in excess of \$1 million/annum, or less if the alleged errors affect personal property or business in a substantial manner.

Replication means that comparable results may be obtained with the same underlying procedure when using data from other geographical locations, time periods, etc. than employed in the original study.

Reproducibility means the information may be substantially recreated within an acceptable level of imprecision.

Transparency connotes that informed users and other professionals can determine and evaluate the statistical and scientific processes that underlie the information.

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