



# Citizens Advisory Council

---

to the Department of Environmental Protection

P.O. Box 8459 • Rachel Carson State Office Building

Harrisburg, PA 17105-8459 • 717-787-4527 • Fax 717-772-2291

Please Note: Our New Fax Number is 717-772-5748

February 14, 2000

The Honorable James M. Seif  
Secretary  
Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection  
PO Box 2063  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-2063

Dear Secretary Seif:

At our November 1999 meeting, Council's Environmental Stewardship committee met with Helen Olena to discuss current DEP environmental education efforts. We commend the Department for the breadth and scope of activities, especially over the last six months—many important and timely issues are receiving coverage.

We continue, however, to observe the lack of comprehensive planning and direction on what is chosen to be written and disseminated from DEP as environmental education and environmental information. The outcome and effectiveness of the Department's efforts in both categories could be enhanced if overall goals, direction and timing framed what the Department is trying to achieve rather than making such decisions piecemeal or on an on-demand basis. This recommendation is particularly timely and in line with DEP's recent focus on evaluating outcomes and performance.

As we have conveyed earlier, we urge you to develop a process to prioritize, coordinate and review environmental education and environmental information being issued by DEP. One option might be to set up an intra-agency committee, as was proposed some time ago, but to our knowledge never implemented. This committee should establish a procedure to ensure that all materials produced go through a defined review process, but could also make recommendations on priorities, and address some of the following areas:

- Clearly stated, measurable goals;
- Mechanisms for maintaining accountability and consistency;
- Assessment of the needs of the target audiences of these programs and initiatives; and
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of environmental education and information expenditures, both grants and funds used by the agency.

A parallel need exists for cooperation with other state agencies that prepare and release environmental education materials. We are sure you are aware of concerns regarding an environmental education curriculum on forest management being produced by the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and another package on clearcutting



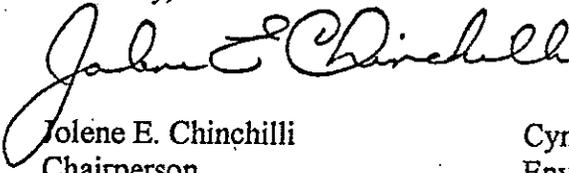
produced by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). There is concern that the information was compiled with the help of industry groups, but without review by other relevant groups, including DEP. Such solo efforts seem to ignore the Environmental Education Act and the partnership theme espoused by this administration. We have questions and concerns about the relationship and relative role of environmental education efforts in DEP, DCNR, PDE and the Pennsylvania Environmental Education Center, and about the lines of communication and coordination between the various efforts.

The current methodology indicates a need for checks and balances among the agencies so that information that is billed by a state agency as environmental education truly is environmental education with a balance of viewpoints. PDE, DEP, DCNR and the other state resource agencies are presumed by the general public to be the experts in their fields. When environmental education materials are disseminated by one of these agencies, they are presumed to be factually based and representative of the current realm of thought on the topic, thus "opinion neutral." Establishing a defined review process including not only environmental educators from the other agencies but also external experts can help to ensure such neutrality.

We ask that you consider having DEP take the lead in establishing a defined review process, including needed checks and balances, for interagency cooperation. One positive and appropriate step is to ask that the Environmental Education Advisory Council begin to meet to carry out such functions. The CAC believes the State's efforts in the area of environmental education would benefit from the ongoing scrutiny of a body similar in composition to the Environmental Education Advisory Council.

Thank you for your attention to these issues. If you have any questions, please call Sue Wilson at 787-4527. We look forward to hearing your response in the near future.

Sincerely,

  
Jolene E. Chinchilli  
Chairperson

  
Cynthia Carrow  
Environmental Stewardship Committee Chair