

# **EPA SCRUBBING LIBRARY WEBSITE TO MAKE REPORTS UNAVAILABLE Agency Sells \$40,000 Worth of Furniture and Equipment for \$350**

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Washington, DC — In defiance of Congressional requests to immediately halt closures of library collections, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is purging records from its library websites, making them unavailable to both agency scientists and outside researchers, according to documents released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). At the same time, EPA is taking steps to prevent the re-opening of its shuttered libraries, including the hurried auctioning off of expensive bookcases, cabinets, microfiche readers and other equipment for less than a penny on the dollar.

In a letter dated November 30, 2006, four incoming House Democratic committee chairs demanded that EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson assure them “that the destruction or disposition of all library holdings immediately ceased upon the Agency's receipt of this letter and that all records of library holdings and dispersed materials are being maintained.” On the very next day, December 1st, EPA de-linked thousands of documents from the website for the Office of Prevention, Pollution and Toxic Substances (OPPTS) Library, in EPA’s Washington D.C. Headquarters.

Last month without notice to its scientists or the public, EPA abruptly closed the OPPTS Library, the agency’s only specialized research repository on health effects and properties of toxic chemicals and pesticides. The web purge follows reports that library staffers were ordered to destroy its holdings by throwing collections into recycling bins.

“EPA’s leadership appears to have gone feral, defying all appeals to reason or consultation,” stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch, noting that Congress has yet to review, let alone approve, the library closures. “The new Congress convening in January will finally have a chance to decide whether EPA will continue to pillage its library network.”

Meanwhile, in what appears to be an effort to limit Congressional options, EPA is taking steps to prevent the re-opening of the several libraries that it has already completely shuttered. In its Chicago office, which formerly hosted one of the largest regional

libraries, EPA ordered that all furniture and furnishings (down to the staplers and pencil sharpeners) be sold immediately. Despite an acquisition cost of \$40,000 for the furniture and equipment, a woman bought the entire lot for \$350. The buyer also estimates that she will re-sell the merchandise for \$80,000.

“One big irony is that EPA claimed the reason it needed to close libraries was to save money but in the process they are spending and wasting money like drunken sailors,” Ruch added, noting EPA refuses to say how much it plans to spend digitizing the mountains of documents that it has removed from library shelves. “While the Pentagon had its \$600 toilet seat and \$434 hammer, EPA has its 29 cent book case and file cabinets for a nickel.”

In spite of its pleas of poverty, EPA is spending millions on a public relations campaign to improve the image of its research program, as well as a \$2.7 million program (more than its estimated savings from library closures ) to digitize all employee personnel files, in a program called “eOPF.”

“No one believes that EPA is closing libraries and crating up irreplaceable collections for fiscal reasons,” Ruch concluded. “Instead, the real agenda appears to be controlling access by its own specialists and outside researchers to key technical information.”