

# **Blogging at EPA for Greenversations**

## **May 30, 2008 (minor updates December 8, 2008)**

### **General Description**

EPA employees from every organizational level and location will write blog entries about personal experiences related to their work, with the goal of engaging the public to help accomplish EPA's mission to protect human health and the environment. Non-EPA people may also be invited to blog such as other federal, state, tribal, or business leaders or staff.

HQ Public Affairs will:

- Maintain the blog, including the look and feel and pages for the comment policy, blog description, etc.
- Review each post. This will primarily be for policy and legal issues; other editing will be very light, essentially only to correct spelling or grammatical mistakes.
- Coordinate review with the Office of General Counsel for legal issues.
- Upload posts (repeat bloggers may be trained to post themselves).
- Moderate comments, denying only those that fail to meet the comment policy (attached).

Regional Public Affairs Directors and HQ Communications Directors in AA immediate offices will identify bloggers.

Supervisors of bloggers will:

- Commit staff time to at least monthly postings.
- Read and obtain at least Division Director-level approval for each post; as with Public Affairs review, this is to ensure posts don't violate laws or established processes.

Each blogger will:

- Complete training about blogging to be sure they understand the group blog purpose, appropriate blogging style, and any related responsibilities.
- Write a short description of themselves and the subjects they will write about, to be posted each time they write.
- Write 200-400 word posts.
- Review comments on their posts and respond as appropriate in the form of further comments.

Depending on EPA staff interest, bloggers will usually write about once a month. This will prevent the blog from appearing to be owned by only a certain few regular bloggers. However, this should be allowed to vary depending on the nature of the blog. For example, someone might write several consecutive posts during an emergency response or for a special feature.

### **Preparing to Blog**

Please provide a very brief biography about yourself, including name, relationship to EPA, and pertinent facts that will illuminate your blog entries. For example:

*Jack Sprat joined EPA's Denver office in 2006 and oversees underground injection wells in Great Plains states. His family's recent purchase of a hybrid car was inspired by their desire to improve air quality in the Rocky Mountains.*

Please also provide a small digital photo of yourself. HQ Public Affairs can help with cropping and resizing if necessary, but the ideal would be about 200 pixels on the long side.

Please send your photo and bio to:  
[insert staff names]

### **Government Blogging Examples**

If you've never blogged before, it may help you to read a few blog entries. Read the blogs listed below and see a sample post, attached as Appendix 1.

#### Group blogs (multiple writers)

- **2008 Great Lakes Earth Day Challenge** – A group blog by EPA Chicago (Region 5) staff and guests, as they develop and run their Earth Day month program about proper disposal of pills and e-waste (and are hosted by FOTR). See <http://flowoftheriver.epa.gov/greatlakeschallenge>
- **DIPNote** – State Department employees offer the public an alternative source to mainstream media for U.S. foreign policy information. See <http://blogs.state.gov>
- **TSA's Evolution of Security** - TSA staffers discuss issues related to transportation security. <http://www.tsa.gov/blog/>

#### Single-writer blogs

- **Flow of the River** – the blog kept by Marcus Peacock, EPA Deputy Administrator and occasional guests. Although it ended on April 22, 2008, it's a useful archive to review for tone, use of humor, and general approach to blogging. See <http://www.epa.gov/flowoftheriver/>
- **Mike Leavitt's Blog** – The Secretary of HHS blogs to foster public discussion, to engage Americans in the exchange of ideas on health care and the provision of human services, and share his observations. See <http://secretarysblog.hhs.gov>

### Writing Blog Posts

Bloggng is another way for us to educate the public and accomplish EPA's mission; it's not like a personal blog, which is simply a place for you to express your opinions about whatever grabs your interest. Like a personal blog, however, the tone is personal, images liven things up and add another way of delivering information, and short biographies help readers get to know the writers.

Plan to write at least one post per month. If you and HQ Public Affairs are both interested, that could become more frequent.

HQ Public Affairs will upload your blog text and images and will contact you in case of questions.

For each post, consider the following questions:

- What's the nature of the problem you're working on?
- How does your personal or work history relate to the problem?
- What are you doing to come up with a solution? What are the benefits to the reader? (essentially, why should the reader care?)
- What progress has already been made?
- How does this fit into EPA's overall mission of protecting human health and the environment?
- What can the reader do?

You should:

- **Write 200-400 words** for each entry (about 3/4 page of printed 12-point text).
- **No ghostwriting.** Write your own posts.
- **Submit or suggest at least one image, graphic, video, or other non-text item to include in your post.** HQ Public Affairs can help you find appropriate materials if necessary, and will ensure that posts are accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Use personal experiences and perspective to engage the reader.** Sharing your own interests and background lets readers see you as someone with issues and concerns similar to theirs, connecting them to EPA's mission. Similarly, you can connect issues at the personal level to how their businesses can help protect the environment. Examples: buying a new car, hiking and appreciating clean air, learning about your home's drinking water quality, and learning about compact fluorescent light bulbs.
- **Write expressively about how you personally are involved with EPA's efforts.** Don't focus on your job title or position, but rather share stories of your work. Help people understand why EPA's efforts matter. Examples: taking air samples, responding to emergencies, serving on research vessels like the Bold, inspecting facilities, and talking to kids about protecting the environment.
- **Write in an informal, personal tone.** Think party conversation, not news release or fact sheet. If you want, HQ Public Affairs can help you work on this.

- **Create a title for each post.**
- **Include at least one Web address on EPA's site** (beginning with <http://> ) where the reader can go for more information about your topic. More links are better. You may also link outside EPA's site if appropriate.
- **Suggest keywords/tags for each post.** Again, HQ Public Affairs can help. Keywords help readers find your post.
- **Read comments made on your posts and respond as you see fit, in the form of further comments.** HQ Public Affairs will moderate comments. Note that comments may be critical, or even harsh. However, they will be approved unless they use vulgar language, are threatening, or violate other narrow restrictions. See the comment policy in Appendix 2.

You should not:

- Simply repeat EPA Web content or use your entry as a new EPA Web page.
- Announce program activities or opportunities unless you are coordinating with a news release or other mechanism.
- Mimic news releases.
- Overwhelm the reader with facts and figures. Keep it simple and link to more details.
- Violate the cautionary areas discussed below.

### **Cautionary Areas**

EPA blog content is federal content and, thus, public domain. Therefore, use only images that are also public domain. Photographs and video taken by EPA staff as part of their jobs meet this requirement. If you have questions about copyright, please contact HQ Public Affairs.

EPA blogging is a privilege, not a right. Because of federal and legal responsibilities, EPA management reserves the right to review blog content or to un-invite anyone to blog. However, the content of any one blog post will generally be reviewed in whole to keep or remove, not edited piecemeal beyond grammar and spelling.

Blog postings must not violate any federal laws. For example, they may not:

- reveal information about ongoing investigations
- discuss deliberative materials
- violate the regulatory process
- circumvent FOIA or other "process"
- violate privacy or copyright
- violate other legal issues that may apply

Blog entries must not outright contradict or encourage misuse of EPA directions, guidance or other official information.

Bloggers will not recommend or criticize specific companies, brands or products with personal opinions. Government facts about recalls, data, etc. are fine to use. Consider citing or linking to the source if it could be questioned.

Bloggers will not give specific advice (e.g. medical, financial) unless citing previously published government material.

### **To Submit Your Posts and For Further Information**

Other questions or concerns you may have – please contact the HQ Office of Public Affairs:  
[insert staff names]

## Appendix 1: Example Blog Post

This is an excellent example of a government blog post: it uses an informal tone, a personal connection, images, and many links to help readers take action themselves. It appeared in the Region 5 Great Lakes Challenge blog on April 3, 2008 at <http://flowoftheriver.epa.gov/greatlakeschallenge/2008/04/what-goes-around.html>

### What Goes Around, Comes Around

*Chris Newman works in EPA Region 5's Land and Chemical Division, and deals with issues related to electronic waste, scrap tires, and composting.*

So here we are preparing for the Great Lakes 2008 Earth Day Challenge, and working to get the word out about [recycling electronic waste \(e-waste\)](#) and [properly disposing of unneeded pharmaceuticals](#). Then it struck me again, as it has a few times in my 4 ½ years here at EPA as the e-waste expert, just how ironic this all is for me.

You see, many years ago while I was in high school (before studying soils in college and then working as a crop extensionist in the [Peace Corps](#)), I was pretty heavy into electronics and computers, to the point that I was President of the high school amateur (Ham) radio club. And I worked at two large retailers, one a catalog retailer and the other a national chain that sells consumer electronics and electronics parts, *selling all of these electronics that I am now encouraging people to recycle*. Ironic. Talk about making your own future!

Back then, when I was selling people their first cell phone or home computer, and a 286 was considered "smokin'", we never gave any thought to what would happen to what we sold at the end of its life. We were just happy to have the sale. I don't think we ever imagined how fast new products would be introduced in the future, or that people would replace things for any other reason than because they broke. "Planned obsolescence" wasn't thought about - - at least not on the sales floor. But there were a few new things coming out all the time, some winners and others losers.

When we changed out the rechargeable battery in a cordless phone, we just threw it out without a second thought, even though at the time as a society we knew that there might be some issues with the materials inside it.



Now the same store collects those batteries for recycling with the [Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation](#). EXIT Disclaimer And the same with the cell phones we sold, the computers, the TVs, and just about anything else. There are options now to recycle them, and the store or the manufacturer that sold your fancy new gadget to you is likely playing a part in recycling it when you're done with it. Sometimes it's just as easy as looking for a label or phone number on the product, or [visiting the manufacturer's website](#).

It's great that we're thinking about what's going to happen to all of these things at the end of their life, but there's still more work to be done to get the word out, and get people to use these services for reusing or recycling e-waste.

## Appendix 2: Comment Policy

The purpose of this blog is to discuss how various EPA employees approach their work, as a way of making what EPA does more open to the public. We encourage comments. Your ideas and concerns are important to ensure that a broad range of Americans are active and informed participants in how EPA's work gets done.

We want to publish your comments, but we expect conversations to follow the conventions of polite discourse. Therefore, we won't post comments that:

- contain vulgar language, personal attacks of any kind, or offensive terms that target specific ethnic or racial groups
- promote services or products (non-commercial links that are relevant to the blog post or comment are acceptable)
- are far off-topic
- make unsupported accusations.

We don't edit comments to remove objectionable content, so please ensure that your comment contains none of the above.

Reporters are asked to send questions to the [EPA Newsroom](#) through their normal channels and to refrain from submitting questions here as comments. Reporter questions will not be posted.

We recognize that the Web is a 24/7 medium and your comments are welcome at any time. However, given the need to manage federal resources, moderating and posting of comments will generally occur during regular business hours Monday through Friday. Comments submitted after hours or on weekends will be read and posted as early as possible the next business day.

To protect your own privacy and the privacy of others, please do not include phone numbers or email addresses in the body of your comment. [Please read the privacy discussion in Frequent Questions.](#)

Thank you for taking the time to read this comment policy. We encourage your participation in our discussion and look forward to an active exchange of ideas.

## Appendix 3: Checklist for blog entry submission

These are the things HQ Public Affairs needs to complete and post your blog entry. Please be sure to provide each item to ensure timely posting of your entry.

\_ if this is your first entry, please provide a 2-sentence biography. Mention what you do and when you joined EPA. If you work in a regional office, mention the city, not the region number. See examples already in Greenversations. We'll use the same bio for each of your entries.

\_ write your entry in Word for our records

\_ entry should be 200-400 words

\_ have your second-level manager review your post for legal or policy concerns discussed on page 3, to be sure you're not violating procedural requirements (e.g., discussing a rule under development outside the normal comment process). This is not a word-level editing pass.

\_ use only plain text and numbers; please use as little formatting (underlines, italics, bold) as possible

\_ put the title at the top

\_ underline text you want to link and put the corresponding URL in brackets next to the words to be linked. [http://www... ] ; do not embed links in your Word document behind link text (but it's okay if Word hotlinks the URL itself). Start each URL with "http://". See sample below.

\_ provide at least one image in .gif or .jpg format. We will resize and optimize if needed.

\_ indicate where in the text each image should go, if it is critical. You may either add text indicating where to put them or insert them as images in the Word file (but also email them as separate attachments either way). See sample below.

\_ attach each image as a separate file when you send your entries to OPA. Do not embed images in emails or solely embed them in the Word document.

\_ verify that all images must be free of copyright issues: public domain, you own the copyright, or you have a license to use them. In general, don't download images off the Internet.

### SAMPLE

Title - Goals

*About the author: John Doe has been an on-scene coordinator with Superfund since 2000 and joined EPA 13 years before that. John's responses have ranged from fifty gallon oil spills on a small creek to spending seven weeks in a FEMA trailer helping with the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.*

I'm an on-scene coordinator (OSC) [<http://www.epa.gov/emergencies/content/nrs/nrsosc.htm>] in Region 10 (AK, ID, OR and WA) and it is my considered opinion that I have the best job in the Agency.

[image of me in a moon suit]

I should know; in 21 years of service with EPA ...