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More Federal User Fees Could Be Part of a Mini Budget Deal

by Nick Schwellenbach

Observers have [low expectations](#) of the special House-Senate committee set up to craft recommendations for a long-term fiscal deal to replace the next nine years of so-called "sequestration" (automatic and indiscriminate budget cuts). Those recommendations are due by Dec. 13. The committee [met](#) for the first time last week, with Republicans publicly opposed to [tax reforms](#) that could generate more revenue and Democrats rejecting a spending cuts-only approach. But [some](#) think a [smaller deal](#) could happen to replace a year or more of sequestration, involving more "federal user fees" as a modest way to generate more funding.

There are substantial reasons to believe user fees are on the table. President Barack Obama proposed a wide array of such fees in his Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 budget blueprint released in April ([see pages 223-232](#)). Special Committee Co-Chair Paul Ryan (R-WI) requested and received a Government Accountability Office (GAO) [report](#) on designing user fees.

The president's proposals – if they had been enacted for the full FY 2014 budget period (which began on Oct. 1) – would have increased estimated revenue by $3.2 billion in 2014 and an average of $16.9

billion from 2015 through 2023 for a total of $155.3 billion in additional revenue over ten years. This total sum on its own would be enough to replace roughly one and a half years of sequestration cuts. (Of course, these proposals were not enacted.)

The president's user fee proposals are diverse; there are at least 45 of them. Some are controversial. It is unclear which user fees are being discussed by the joint House-Senate committee.

This article will briefly describe what federal user fees are, the philosophy behind them, and some standards for assessing their appropriateness. It will then briefly examine a small handful of proposals in the president's latest budget blueprint.

What Are User Fees?

The White House estimates that user fees already comprise $326.5 billion in federal revenue in FY 2014 alone. These fees are defined by the White House the following way: "fees, charges, and assessments levied on individuals or organizations directly benefiting from or subject to regulation by a Government program or activity, where the payers do not represent a broad segment of the public such as those who pay income taxes."

There are other ways of defining user fees. For the purposes of this piece, the White House's definition is used. User fees do not include dedicated taxes (such as Social Security taxes or gasoline taxes), customs duties, or fines or penalties that come out of civil and criminal cases.

When Do User Fees Make Sense?

When Benefits are Limited in Scope

Fees are appropriate when a relatively small number of people or businesses directly benefit from a government activity – and the government activity in question is not intended to produce a general social benefit. In these circumstances, fees are levied on a particular group that receives special benefits, instead of being spread across the general population. But while this seems like a clear principle, in real world situations, the lines can be murky and judgments about whether certain programs have broad benefits versus more narrow benefits may be subjective.

Not Appropriate for Services that Provide Broad Benefits

Taxes, rather than user fees, are a more appropriate mechanism for funding programs that are of broad benefit by all or most members of society. The White House uses this example to illustrate the difference: "The benefits from national defense accrue to the public in general, and according to this principle should be (and are) financed by taxes. In contrast, the benefits of electricity sold by the Tennessee Valley Authority accrue primarily to those using the electricity, and should be (and are) financed by user charges."

In Some Cases, Fees May Supplement Taxpayer Funding

Other scenarios call for a mixture of funding from both taxes and fees. The White House points to national parks as an example: "...the benefits from recreation areas are mixed. Fees for visitors to these areas are appropriate because the visitors benefit directly from their visit, but the public in general also benefits because these areas protect the Nation's natural and historic heritage now and for posterity. For this reason, visitor recreation fees do not generally cover the full cost to the Government of maintaining the recreation property."

How High Should the Fees Be?

When the government uses its sovereign governmental authority to certify the safety of a product, as it does when providing Food and Drug Administration approval, it seems fair to charge a company what the approval process costs the government to perform. If the government is engaged in a business-like activity, such as leasing federal buildings to companies, it should charge market prices. Below-market prices could undercut private competition, as well as yield less revenue for the government.

The GAO notes in its September report that fees authorized under the Independent Offices Appropriation Act "must be (1) fair and (2) based on costs to the government, on the value of the service or thing to the recipient, on public policy, or on interest serviced."

A Selection of White House User Fee Proposals

The president's budget is the starting point in the normal annual budget process. While the budget process has not followed normal rules for several years, it is still an important point of reference for congressional and executive branch deliberations on fiscal policies. The budget is also a political document in that it represents the priorities of the White House.

The following user fee examples are taken from the president's budget for fiscal year 2014. The first is a controversial proposal that some might be surprised to learn is considered a user fee.

Means-Test Medicare Premiums: $50 billion over 10 years

One of the Obama administration's most controversial proposals would increase the monthly premium that higher-income seniors pay for Medicare. Arguably, this double-taxes higher-income Medicare recipients who already paid higher taxes in their working years. If some participants drop medical or prescription drug coverage because of the higher fees, it could also produce gaps in health care coverage and increase per-capita costs. Imposing "user fees" on higher-income seniors' premiums would result in $50 billion in revenue over 10 years.

Moreover, means-testing could also erode political support for Medicare over the long run. As a detailed Center for Effective Government article on these means-testing proposals noted earlier this year: "Programs that provide equal benefits to citizens regardless of income are more likely to retain much broader popular support over time than means-tested programs."

Higher Industry Fees for Food and Drug Administration Activities: $3 billion over 10 years

The White House has proposed enabling the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to charge fees to fund its operations. Fees would be charged to:

- Medical product manufacturers for re-inspections if violations are discovered during an initial inspection ($150 million over 10 years);
- Food facilities for registration and inspections, as well as for food imports. These would "finance activities that support the safety and security of America's food supply and help meet the requirements of the FDA Food Safety Modernization Act" ($2.5 billion over 10 years);
- International couriers (e.g. UPS, FedEx) that are bringing a growing number of imports regulated by the FDA, especially medical products, into the U.S. This fee would pay for more FDA surveillance of imported products ($60 million over 10 years);
- Cosmetic and other beauty products companies to help pay for FDA oversight of safety related to these goods ($200 million over 10 years);
- Companies that notify the Food Contact Notification Program before marketing packaging and processing equipment that come into contact with food. The revenue will help FDA "promote safety and understanding of the products that into contact with food" ($50 million over 10 years).

In total, these fees are estimated to generate roughly $3 billion in additional funding for FDA over 10 years.

Military Health Care Co-Payment Increase and Greater Fees: $29.7 billion over 10 years

The president's budget contains proposals that would increase medical costs for active duty military families and retirees that use TRICARE, the Defense Department's health care program. The proposals would:

- Increase pharmacy benefit co-payments "to encourage the use of less expensive mail order pharmacies and military treatment facility pharmacies." This would save an estimated $15.3 billion over 10 years directly and lead to $4.7 billion in savings in the Medicare Eligible Retiree Health Care Fund.
- Increase enrollment fees, increase deductibles, and adjust the catastrophic cap. These proposals combined would save an estimated $9.7 billion over 10 years.

Organizations such as the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America have generally opposed increasing health care-related fees for active duty members of the military, their families, and veterans.

Aviation Security Fee Increase: $25.9 billion over 10 years

Since 9/11 and the establishment of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), the aviation passenger security fee charged each passenger has remained at $2.50 per plane flown – limited to a maximum of $5 per one-way trip. Meanwhile, TSA's costs have risen. The fee currently pays for about 30 percent of TSA's costs, including the Federal Air Marshal Service and TSA overhead. The White

House's proposal would change the fee to $5 per one-way trip (regardless of how many planes the passenger is on) and then allow a 50 cent annual increase from 2015 through 2019. This proposal is estimated to raise $25.9 billion over 10 years. Of this, $7.9 billion would be used to pay for aviation security and the other $18 billion would be used for deficit reduction.

Increase the Budget of a Key Financial Regulator: $3.2 billion over 10 years

The White House proposes allowing the Commodity Futures Trading Commission to collect fees from the businesses it regulates equal to the appropriations it gets from Congress – in theory, this could up to double the CFTC's budget by an estimated $3.2 billion over 10 years. The CFTC's mandate was greatly increased under the Dodd-Frank Act of financial regulatory reforms that gave it the power to oversee over-the-counter derivatives or swaps, which played a part in the financial crisis. "At 674 people, we are only slightly larger than we were 20 years ago," said CFTC Chairman Gary Gensler in a speech on Oct. 31. "Since then though, Congress gave us the job of overseeing the $400 trillion swaps market, which is more than 10 times the size of the futures market we oversaw just four years ago. Further, the futures market itself has grown fivefold since the 1990s."

Giving the CFTC the power to charge user fees would also "make CFTC funding more consistent with the funding mechanisms in place for other Federal financial regulators," such as the Securities and Exchange Commission. Because other regulators charge user fees, "the CFTC was the only regulatory agency that was essentially closed during the US government shutdown earlier this month," as the *Financial Times* noted.

"One of the greatest threats to well-functioning, open, and competitive swaps and futures markets is that the agency tasked with overseeing them is not sized to the task at hand," Gensler said in his speech. Because of current budget limitations, the CFTC may have to delay enforcement cases or drop some altogether and may face difficulty retaining and recruiting talented employees. One example of a dropped enforcement case due to inadequate resources, according to the *Wall Street Journal*: "the agency's decision not to charge Julien Grout and Javier Martin-Artajo, the two former J.P. Morgan traders accused by the government of hiding multibillion-dollar losses."

Make Oil and Gas Companies Drilling on Federal Lands Pay for Inspections: $480 million over 10 years

The Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) wants to charge new inspection fees to oil and gas companies that drill on federal lands. The fees would be based on the number of wells per oil and gas company drilling facility and are estimated to generate $48 million in 2014. BLM predicts that it could both expand its inspection and enforcement program (by $10 million) while reducing its reliance on taxpayer dollars to fund its operations (by $38 million). Over 10 years, these fees would generate nearly half a billion dollars.

Oil and Gas Royalty Reforms: $2.5 billion over 10 years

The administration proposes a package of legislative and administrative changes that would increase the return to taxpayers when federal resources are sold and developed by oil and gas companies. According to the budget, the changes proposed are:

- Establishing minimum royalty rates for oil, gas, and similar products;
- Increasing the standard onshore oil and gas royalty rate to align it with the higher offshore rate;
- Repealing legislatively mandated royalty relief for "deep gas" wells;
- Use stronger oil and gas development requirements like shorter leases, stricter enforcement of lease terms, and monetary incentives to move leases into production;
- Simplify the way royalties are valued; and
- Get rid of royalty "in kind" payments (e.g. where payment is made in oil and gas itself instead of monetary payments).

The White House estimates that these reforms will collectively generate $2.5 billion in revenue over ten years. More money would be generated for state governments as well because royalties from production on federal lands is split with the states where the production occurs.

User Fee Proposals Must Be Assessed Individually

Collectively, these seven user fees alone would generate about $115 billion over 10 years. If all 45 of the user fees suggested in the president's FY 2014 budget were enacted, over $155 billion in revenue would be raised over 10 years. Yet, as demonstrated above, some user fees are controversial and represent a significant departure from current policy. Each proposal and its impact on the constituencies affected should be carefully examined. In an upcoming paper, the Center for Effective Government will conduct a deeper examination of the president's user fee proposals.

Congress Continues Efforts to Thwart Climate Change Emissions Limits

by Katie Weatherford

On Sept. 20, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced a new proposal to limit carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from new coal-fired power plants. The Center for Effective Government applauded the steady progress on the rule but warned of likely challenges from climate-change deniers, regulatory opponents, and their allies in Congress. Over the past month, these challenges have appeared in the form of draft legislation and appropriations riders that seek to repeal or severely limit EPA's authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from fossil-fueled power plants under the Clean Air Act.

Carbon Emissions Limits Are Central to President's Climate Action Plan

The limits on CO2 from new power plants are a critical component of President Obama's action plan to address climate change. Carbon dioxide is the primary greenhouse gas contributing to global warming and climate changes that have occurred over the past several decades; fossil fuel combustion for electricity generation "is the largest single source of CO2 emissions in the nation." By EPA's calculations, CO2 emissions accounted for roughly "38% of total U.S. CO2 emissions and 32% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in 2011."

EPA first proposed emissions limits in April 2012 in response to a 2010 settlement agreement. But after receiving heavy criticism from the coal industry, the Obama administration decided to revise the rule. On Sept. 20 of this year, EPA announced a new proposal for new power plants. When finalized, the rule will require large gas-fired plants to limit carbon emissions to 1,000 pounds per megawatt-hour of electricity produced and require smaller gas-fired plants and all new coal-fired plants to meet a limit of 1,100 pounds of CO2 per megawatt-hour.

The rule has yet to be published in the *Federal Register*, presumably because of a backlog of publications caused by the government shutdown during the first weeks of October. Once published, a 60-day comment period will officially begin and the docket will be made available online. Meanwhile, EPA has already posted the proposal on its website, scheduled public hearings across the U.S., and started accepting public comments.

Legislative Efforts to Silence EPA Are Underway

Even before EPA's initial proposal in 2012, anti-regulatory forces in Congress were seeking to undermine efforts to reduce carbon pollution. According to a database compiled by the House Energy and Commerce Committee minority staff, during the 112th Congress (January 2011 to January 2012), the House voted 53 times to block actions to address climate change.

The 2011 Continuing Resolution (H.R. 1) prohibited EPA from using funds to issue or enforce any regulation on emissions of greenhouse gases due to climate change concerns. Rep. Ted Poe (R-TX) offered an amendment to the resolution that would have blocked EPA from regulating greenhouse gas emissions from stationary sources for any reason. Representatives also attached "riders" to both the FY 2012 and FY 2013 House Interior and Environment appropriations bills to prohibit or delay EPA from setting limits on carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gas emissions.

The 113th Congress has continued efforts to prevent EPA action to address CO2 emissions. Just days before EPA announced its proposal to limit CO2 emissions from new power plants, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) introduced legislation to prevent EPA from finalizing the standards.

New Legislation: A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

On Oct. 28, Rep. Ed Whitfield (R-KY), joined by Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV), released a discussion draft bill with the same prohibitive language of past efforts to prevent regulation of greenhouse gas emissions. However, upon releasing the draft text, Manchin called it "a consensus, middle, doable

procedure that we can abide by." This bill is not moderate. The three major components of the bill would:

Void EPA's Proposed Emissions Limits: The bill would repeal any proposed rule or guidance that EPA has issued to limit carbon emissions from new power plants. The bill says these "rules and guidelines shall be of no force or effect, and shall be treated as though such rules and guidelines had never been issued." Additionally, the bill prohibits EPA from proposing or finalizing a rule or guidance to limit emissions of *any greenhouse gas* from existing power plants. By requiring EPA to start again from scratch, the bill guarantees several more years of delay before EPA can move forward.

Require Congress to Reauthorize EPA to Limit Emissions from Existing Plants and Set Deadline: Under the bill, EPA cannot limit emissions of any greenhouse gas from an existing or modified power plant until Congress enacts a law specifying the effective date of the rule or guidance. Further, no rule or guidance will become effective until EPA submits a report to Congress regarding the economic impact of the rule. Notably, this report would not be required to include any of the many benefits of limiting emissions.

Impose an Unworkable Standard for Regulating Emissions of Any Greenhouse Gas: Before EPA can issue any emissions limits on new power plants, the agency would be required to establish a separate standard for gas-fired and coal-fired plants (as it has already done in its Sept. 20 proposal). Further, EPA must show that at least six commercial scale coal-fired power plants in different locations throughout the U.S. have achieved the proposed limits for a full year. For power plants fired with lignite coal, EPA must show that the standards were achieved for a full year by three units at different plants throughout the U.S.

To ensure that EPA can never satisfy this standard, the law prevents the agency from using the results of "any demonstration project" in setting the standard. A demonstration project is defined as "a project to test or demonstrate the feasibility of carbon capture and storage technologies that has received government funding or financial assistance." EPA based its current proposal on projects across the country where carbon capture and storage technology has been installed to demonstrate that the standard is achievable.

Under the new bill, these projects would not be valid evidence of the viability of the new standards. Instead, only efforts that industry undertakes voluntarily to use carbon capture and storage technology without any government assistance could be used to justify a new standard. Obviously, industry has no incentive to install this technology because doing so would subject it to regulation. Whitfield has even acknowledged this point. *E&E News* reports that when asked whether industry would invest in this technology without a mandate by EPA or financial assistance, Whitfield said "no." Rather, under this impossible standard, industry has a large incentive to continue emitting greenhouse gases so that EPA can never issue regulations to limit those emissions.

The new legislation has not garnered the support of any prominent lawmakers or organizations that support stronger greenhouse gas emissions controls. Rep. Henry Waxman (D-CA) called it "scientific lunacy" in a statement opposing the bill. According to a recent poll, 74 percent of voters in swing

Senate states support EPA's proposed emissions limits for coal-fired power plants, and 66 percent of all voters surveyed trusted EPA more than Congress to make decisions about issuing those regulations. If enacted, this bill would thwart efforts to reduce the nation's major source of climate change-causing carbon pollution.

Conclusion

When the president directed EPA to issue rules to cut carbon emissions from new and existing power plants, no one expected the task to be easy. Despite challenges from industry interests and climate-change deniers, EPA is moving forward; it needs to promptly finalize the limits it has proposed to cut $CO2$ emissions from new power plants. But the larger battle may be ahead. EPA is supposed to propose new emissions limits for existing power plants by the June 1, 2014 deadline set forth in Obama's [Presidential Memorandum](#) accompanying his climate action plan. Because the forthcoming rule will regulate the oldest and "dirtiest" facilities and will likely require new investments in carbon capture and storage technology, powerful interests will oppose tougher standards. But limits on both new and existing power plants are crucial if we are going to reduce the risks that carbon dioxide emissions pose to public health and to the environment. For the sake of future generations, this is a fight the EPA must win.

E-Gov Spotlight: EPA's Enforcement Database Gets Updated

by Leeann Sinpatanasakul

On Oct. 23, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released a beta 2.0 version of its enforcement and compliance web-based tool. The new version should make it easier for the public to find information on which facilities near their communities violate air, water, and pollution standards. The agency has requested user feedback as it continues to update and fine-tune the site, so we encourage readers to [visit the website](#) and provide comments on your experience to the agency.

Enforcement and Compliance History Online (ECHO) 2.0

The EPA launched the Enforcement and Compliance History Online (ECHO) in 2003, providing one-stop access to compliance data years ahead of other federal agencies. The web-based tool, which is updated monthly, has allowed the public to see how well facilities are complying with environmental laws, such as the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the Resource Recovery and Conservation Act. Website users can search for information on permits, environmental inspections, and enforcement actions, including violations and penalties, for more than 800,000 facilities nationwide. During ECHO's initial trial run in 2002-2003, the agency received thousands of [e-mails](#) from the public, praising the site for being a tool that will "encourage polluters to change their act" and make them more accountable to "the communities they harm."

Using the Online Tool

The new ECHO website provides the same information found in the previous database. It allows users to search for enforcement and compliance information on facilities in a particular community or review the performance of the all the facilities in a state. However, the new version is more user-friendly, has better tools for site visitors, and makes it easier for a user to find his or her way around the database.

The landing page of the original website has been redesigned, and it is now easier to find and use key search functions. The links that allow a user to search for facilities in a particular community, or to look up a particular facility, or to analyze trends, are now large, clickable graphic icons instead of small, text-based links. The new design gives the site a modern look and it makes browsing ECHO significantly easier on a tablet or a mobile device. The changes will compliment ECHO's mobile version, which is scheduled to launch in late 2013.

One of the most popular features of ECHO 2.0 is the "All Data Search," a powerful tool that allows users to search almost all of the data covered by ECHO (currently, drinking water data is not included). The search feature offers several different types of filters to help users locate the information most relevant to their needs. Users can pull up data on geographic location, a particular facility or industry sector, facilities with violations, or facilities inspected recently. Additionally, users can focus on environmental justice issues by narrowing their search to areas with a high percentage of non-white communities within the population. Users can examine watershed conditions or data from other EPA programs, such as the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) or Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program.

This search flexibility means a wider variety of users will be able to tailor their searches and find what they are looking for faster. Local citizen activist groups can conduct local, specific searches that focus on the local pollution and emissions information relevant to their community. Regional environmental coalitions can compile information from multiple states at a time (a feature not available under the previous search mechanism).

In conducting a search on facilities in Chicago, for example, users will receive information organized in a table regarding: whether facilities in Chicago had violations, any formal enforcement actions, penalties, days since their last inspection, and more. However, this compliance data includes all three major areas covered by the website – air quality, hazardous waste, and water quality. Currently, users can not limit their searches to compliance in a specific program area, but the EPA plans to add this feature in the future.

Other popular features of ECHO 2.0 include the Comparative Maps and the State Dashboards. EPA released both tools earlier this year in preparation for the new site launch. These tools allow users to compare state-by-state incidences of inspections, violations, penalties, and more based on federal air, water, or hazardous waste laws. The site shows a map of the United States with data from each state displayed. A timeline selector in the upper-right corner of the map tool also allows users to select any year from 2009 to 2013 to display state-by-state changes over the past five years.

The dashboard also offers users the opportunity to review the compliance data with visuals, presenting the data as a series of graphs. Graphs display the number of facilities, compliance evaluations, violations, high-priority violations, enforcement actions, and penalties from 2009 through 2013. Users can review all of the data at the national level or select a particular state. The dashboard is a better interface to review trends over time within the compliance data as it allows users to easily spot trends in the last five years and contextualize the information. While these graphs could be generated from the tables provided by the "All Data Search" by an experienced spreadsheet user, having the information displayed automatically online is a benefit to those unfamiliar with making graphs and saves time for those who are. The site allows the more experienced user to download the data into a CSV file, which is useful for those wanting to aggregate the data.

Finally, the tool provides good support and basic website services for users, such as comments/feedback, updates, and data alerts. EPA regularly updates the public via the site or e-mail alerts (anyone can sign up for e-mail alerts through the site) about any new changes made to the ECHO database. Data alerts also address potential issues that may cause information inaccuracies provided in ECHO.

Limits and Recommendations

Although the "All Data Search" on the updated ECHO site is a strong and flexible feature, it could be improved. The ability to filter by air, water, or hazardous waste information would allow users to narrow their results in ways that most would probably find helpful. Drinking water data should also be added to the library of information available for searches.

The website should also integrate explanations of terminology and better descriptors into the search features. Most members of the public won't immediately know what "synthetic minor facilities" are or understand what "facilities subject to informal enforcement" means. Incorporating the ability to obtain definitions and explanations without leaving the search results or map would help users understand what they are reviewing.

The ECHO data also has limitations unrelated to the website's design. The tool uses 1990 Census data in its Demographic Profile of the surrounding three-mile radius of a facility. This data is outdated and may present a misleading demographic profile of a particular city or county. To prevent misinformation, the EPA should update to the 2010 Census data, released in April 2011.

Another underlying data shortcoming is that the tool lists facilities only, but not facilities' parent companies. Users will probably want to examine patterns of noncompliance at facilities owned by the same parent company. This site will not help them do so; a user would have to do independent research identifying the affiliation of each individual facility separately and then aggregating each. This limitation also makes it difficult to match bad corporate actors with other databases, such as federal contracting records.

One final problem is related to ECHO's transition plan. Aside from the more general tools mentioned above, many of the more specific search features and database hubs are still hosted on the old ECHO website. EPA plans to launch updates to its more specific search engines throughout the course of 2014

but will take down the old ECHO website by the end of this month. Since some of the search features will not be available until mid or late 2014, this could reduce the ability of some users to find specific information. Although EPA plans to keep all of the information from its old website available throughout the transition, without reliable search engines, accessing the data most pertinent to one's needs could become difficult and tedious. Although improving the ECHO site was long overdue, a better solution would be to leave the old search engines in place and gradually move them offline as newer interfaces replace them.

Conclusion

The agency has not yet completed the modernization process planned for ECHO, and the new features are only a first step toward the many more improvements expected for the coming year. Yet already, the design and usability of the site has improved significantly. In 2014, EPA plans more improvements: users will be able to refine their results directly on the search screen, the agency will make more than five years of data available for analysis, and it will improve the tool's integration of enforcement/compliance data with pollutant loads. By 2015, the agency promises more data on "non-standard" Clean Water Act facilities, such as large animal feeding operations, and plans to provide links to information from documents, such as inspection reports and enforcement actions. All of these changes will provide the American people with a much more comprehensive and contextualized understanding of how the national government sets and enforces protective standards, and how private companies comply with – or ignore – these health and safety standards. As such, they are welcome advances in transparency.

As the agency moves forward with these changes, users should explore the changing site and contact the EPA with reactions, problems, and suggestions for further improvement.

Sofia Plagakis contributed to this article.