

ANGELA IMBERMAN  
Director, Information Services  
Illinois Institute for Environmental Quality

## State and Local Environmental Information Centers, Facilities, and Services

The federal Environmental Protection Agency has already kindly provided the first edition of a catalog of state and local environmental libraries.<sup>1</sup> However, I wish to provide more than such a catalog. As you may have read in Schneiderman's paper, there are both active and passive library roles to be played. I will concentrate on discussing the possible active roles of an environmental library after I dismiss a few of the passive items.

Browsing through the EPA listing will give you an idea of the range of libraries dealing both generally and specifically with environmentally related materials. Naturally, each state library will collect some environmental journals, books, and conference proceedings. Some state governments which have established either a natural resources department or an environmental research agency have started environmental collections (e.g., Arkansas, Delaware, Michigan, and Illinois). Small, local public libraries try to collect mostly nontechnical, lay reading material on the environmental crisis. In addition to these types of libraries, we must remember to take advantage of all those special collections which may be considered national or regional, but which are also frequently local. For example, unless one lives in Santa Barbara, California, the Oil Spill Information Center there may be unknown. Another narrow subject area is dealt with by the eutrophication program at the University of Wisconsin's Water Resources Center. (A future edition of EPA's directory might contain a subject listing of special collections.) Without assuming to speak for all special libraries, one may say that most of them are happy to serve by phone or mail. Professional associations and foundations ranging from the Conservation Foundation in Washington, D.C., to the American Foundrymen's Society in Des Plaines, Illinois usually have libraries or information centers with very specific environmental information available.

Librarians are traditionally passive, both in waiting for people to come to them and in hoarding all they can get in one place. We must break out of both molds. Information networks and cooperative systems have been discussed for decades. Some are working; others languish; and many never start in spite of years of meetings and talking. Perhaps the problem is that we, with scarce money and people resources, are too busy with our own work to set up systems. Perhaps we already cooperate well as a "closed college" among ourselves, but whenever we try to formalize a structure for cooperation, our structures break our friendly spirits. Whatever the cause of the problem, we should cooperate more in whatever either flexible or formal structure we work best. The university or large public library which has bought an expensive *Particle Atlas* and marked it "reference" should let whoever needs it, use it. Each library, no matter what it purports to be or have, cannot have everything. Let each one collect the type of material it collects best.

One example of how this sharing of resources can be accomplished is illustrated by a project going on in the Illinois Institute for Environmental Quality's (hereafter Institute's) library. From the beginning of the project we have intended to produce a union book catalog for environmental collections in Illinois. It will be computer-produced, and will contain the current acquisitions of the Illinois State Library and of the Institute's library in its first edition. We should be able to integrate it with the EPA's catalog at some future date. Any substantial environmental collection in Illinois is qualified to participate in the second edition. We contemplate distributing this catalog widely—to government agencies, citizens groups, libraries, or anyone who can make good use of it. We should learn more about its potential use when we do a pilot distribution of a solid waste section early in 1973. A union catalog of resources is only one way to start a cooperating information network—what I have been describing above.

Networks for all kinds of subject information are important. Many libraries have joined regional systems for interlibrary loan cooperation, which is the first step. I contend that at least we in the environmental business, if not all others, need an information network made up of data and information generators, users, and controllers, i.e., researchers, consultants, citizens, students, educators, librarians, information scientists, etc. While with current strong efforts to aid the environment and potentially stronger future activity, we may not need to feel that all environmental concerns are of crisis proportions anymore, there is a more acute immediacy to environmental problems than in many fields.

A good deal of the environmental information needed already exists or is being discovered. In addition to the Library of Congress National Referral Center, we need an environmental hot-line. There is a national consumer information hot-line.<sup>2</sup> So far, our "closed colleges" of environmental libraries

are as close as we have come to such a hot-line. Again, we do not need one place which has everything or one person who knows everything, but we do need an instant hot-line network of resources. We were hopeful that the EPA would be assigned a central responsibility for coordination of environmental data bases after the National Environmental Information Symposium in Cincinnati, but evidently this will not happen. Further behind-the-scenes and legislative efforts need to be made during the next Congress to coordinate and centralize environmental data bases at the federal level.

Even without such a federal mandate, state and local efforts can be made now, which will eventually be used to fit into the larger scheme of networks. Some of the Institute's efforts over the past two years, although perhaps not consciously, have dealt with the network problem. The union catalog is a prime example. Our project list, which is issued several times annually, is an attempt to keep others in our state and around the country apprised of all research efforts in order that they may avoid duplication, if possible. Distribution of our generally applicable publications through NTIS with its weekly *Environmental Pollution and Control* alerting service is indeed participation in a national network.<sup>3</sup>

Other Institute networking efforts have resulted in other publications. Partially because of requests to the library and to the Institute staff responsible for solid waste management projects we feel that there is a need to help environmental groups, particularly small local ones, to find each other. The recently published *Directory of Environmental Groups in Illinois* resulted from this need. This kind of inventorying will also help planning in other areas, particularly education. A local Chicago directory, done by the Open Lands Project, was used in developing this statewide listing. I recently received a national listing, "Groups that Can Help," from the EPA. There are many other directories of environmental organizations and groups available. All the pieces of the puzzle do start fitting together.

For people who wish to do something positive as individuals to join in an effort to conserve resources, recycling has become a popular, if not yet perfect, outlet. In order to help these efforts be successful, the Institute recently published a *Directory of Markets for Recyclable Materials*. The directory should be more and more useful as it is improved in successive editions. We have considered publishing a directory of recycling centers. However, because of the effervescent nature of recycling centers, we have concluded that the directory would be out-of-date very quickly and not worth the cost of printing. In response to the need for such information, I would still like to establish a master list of recycling centers at the Institute (or elsewhere), so that anyone knowing of a center could let us know about it, and anyone wanting to know could ask us. Perhaps a meeting of all those running recycling centers in Illinois would produce a useful master manual on

how to establish and run such centers. As Schneiderman in his paper in this volume suggested, I will try to fulfill my role of Institute librarian by continuing to push from the inside for these additional services.

Our master networking effort is aided by a portion of the Illinois Environmental Protection Act which requires us to hold an annual conference. This conference must assess the progress, or lack of progress, in achieving environmental quality in Illinois during the past year. As the second conference is currently just in the early planning stages, we intend to use it to great advantage to get appropriate people together. We see a slowly increasing amount of cooperation among the industrial, educational, and government sectors, but conferences such as ours, if well-structured, should help increase that rate of cooperation.

It is obvious that an environmental library, which is a part of a small, well-funded organization, can take a very active role in shaping policies and activities of that organization. It might be far more difficult for a university or public library to be so influential. However, one area in which any library can naturally take an active role is education. After all, education is the librarian's *raison d'être*. Again, with sufficient funds, a library operation can help to launch rather expansive programs. We have recently completed distributing a packet of environmental education materials to each elementary school in Illinois. The items in this packet were carefully selected by a group of teachers and environmental experts. At least one item missing in that packet was a complete list of environmental education materials available with an evaluative abstract for each item. A bibliography, *Children's Books on Ecology* done by the staff of the Chicago Public Library, was included in the packet. More could be done. Particularly, a children's librarian could help the schools in a local or statewide cooperative effort to develop such a resource listing for distribution.

I know that librarians are busy people. Many are fully occupied in ordering books, cataloging, and answering walk-in reference questions. But also, they have great responsibilities to make sure that information which they so carefully guard and store is used. Whether the librarian's community be a town, school, or university, there are many ways to get involved in helping the constituency improve the environment. I know from the large number of inquiries that we get that few libraries have accepted the challenge. We see an increasing number of environmental councils being formed locally as part of the city government. In order to make informed decisions, those committees should be actively offered the use of local libraries and ready access to networks of environmental information. The city of Winnetka, north of Chicago, will sponsor a half-day conference in the spring of 1973 on the water quality of Lake Michigan—particularly for swimming. The local library could be a valuable preconference interest-generator. It could help find resources, be



a part of the program and spur continuing interest after the conference. The local school librarian could actively play similar roles for her public.

Because of the Institute's involvement in preparing master plans for elementary, secondary and higher education in Illinois, we are well aware of the multitude of federally funded projects and of curricula and special courses being designed for all levels of education. Librarians could and should be active members of committees planning these projects. One of the primary problems of these new projects is that documentation of their development frequently is not disseminated. Since the federal government has not assumed that dissemination responsibility, librarians, through their own organizations, could send reports and materials from local education projects at all levels to a central clearinghouse. This is just a suggestion, but it might work!

The problem is that none of us has a clear mandate to do everything. Should the local community assume responsibility for all of its environmental problems? Should a small, local citizens group make a project of tracking down all recycling centers within a state? Should a university library, in connection with a new environmental studies department, operate in a vacuum and assume that it is the only resource for those students, or should it attempt to apprise itself of other resources and make the students extraordinarily aware of them? There is no reason for any group with resources not to do something. But they should be aware of what has been done and is being done, and how what they choose to do fits into the "big picture."

I close with the following pleas to librarians:

Do what you do best.

Coax others to do what you cannot.

Use all the resources available.

Form or think networks!

Cooperate!

#### REFERENCES

1. U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Library Systems Branch. *State and Local Environmental Libraries*. 1972.
2. "Consumer Hot-Line," *Chicago Daily News*, Nov. 2, 1972. (The Interstate Commerce Commission has established a consumer hot-line telephone designed to give immediate assistance to a caller seeking consumer information. The number for that hot-line is: 202-343-4761.)
3. National Technical Information Service. *Environmental Pollution and Control*. (Weekly Government Abstracts)