Verbatim Transcript for ECHO Webinar: Intro to the Acts

March 22, 2016

Good Afternoon. Welcome to the first of a series of EPA ECHO web tutorials. Today's webinar will focus on the four major environmental laws that are used in enforcement and compliance and why their enforcement is important to our environment.

For today's webinar you will be in listen-only mode. To ask questions please type them in to the question box. Questions will be answered at the end. However, you may type them in at any time. During the course of the webinar there will be three short polls. Please select the appropriate multiple choice answer when the poll pops up on your screen. In closing, the webinar will end with a short survey.

Enjoy the presentation and here is the first poll.

[Poll question: What is your affiliation?]

Welcome. Today we will be starting at a very basic introduction of ECHO, which is the Enforcement and Compliance History Online website.

Today is an introduction to the acts followed--tracked in ECHO and then over the coming months we will be building on skills, tools, and knowledge. These webinars will be recorded so you can look back at them or share them with people who might be interested.

ECHO is a public resource used by EPA, local grassroots groups, and the general public to track violations in facilities. To best utilize the tools in ECHO, it is important to understand the acts that are mentioned and what the permits are meant to track. Today's presentation will be information heavy, but bear with me, we will learn a lot about the Clean Air, Clean Water, Resource Conservation and Recovery, and Safe Drinking Water Acts and next month we'll will start getting into some demonstrations.

The first act we will talk about is the Clean Air Act, which was started back in the 1960s.

In 1963, the Clean Air Act, creating federal programs in the US Public Health Service to research techniques for monitoring and controlling air pollution, was signed in by Lyndon B Johnson. In 1967, the Air Quality Act increased federal activity in investigating and enforcing interstate air pollution and studies of air pollutant emission inventories, monitoring techniques, and control techniques. Those following amendments increased federal involvement.

1970 amendments expanded federal enforcement and required federal and state regulations for stationary and mobile sources of pollution. In the 90s, amendments began to address concerns such as acid rain and toxic air pollution, the 90s also brought about the permit program for stationary sources that we know today, giving enforcement authority to the EPA.

There are two titles around the 90s amendments that are directly related to ECHO and EPA's enforcement efforts.

Title V required large business--businesses--o measure and report their pollutants in one report shared with the State and the Federal governments. Through this, a permitting system was also put in place to ensure tracking of pollutants and tolerable pollution levels.

Title VII increased the enforcement authority in the EPA, giving EPA authority to issue penalties and enhancing the penalties involved with a civil or criminal action against a violator.

Through the ECHO website, you can search for Clean Air Act-permitted facilities by using the facility name or using enforcement and violation activity within the past three years.

Another act recorded in ECHO is the Clean Water Act, which was officially signed in 1972 by President Nixon. The Clean Water Act of 1972 implemented pollution control for wastewater and contaminants in surface waters.

Under the Clean Water Act, facilities are required to have a permit to discharge any type of pollutant from a source into the water. These sources include industrial facilities, government facilities, and agricultural facilities. The Clean Water enables various levels of enforcement from EPA, allowing EPA to issue administrative orders or seek civil and criminal penalties for a first offense, second offense, and more severely, Knowing Endangerment.

Through the ECHO website, you can also search for Clean Water Act facilities through a facility name or research--or enforcement and violation activity.

The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act was signed in 1976 by President Ford after the Solid Waste Disposal Act of 1965 to address the growing volume of municipal and industrial waste.

The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act was set up to prevent future Superfund and other hazardous sites. It outlines standards for design, location, cleanup, and closure of solid waste sites. It also implements a cradle-to-grave strategy for hazardous waste—this means hazardous waste is monitored, tested, and tracked from creation through transport to disposal. Through this act, the EPA also gained more enforcement action. Because of the laws outlined the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, EPA has the ability to issue administrative orders against permit violators and, when necessary, pursue civil or criminal action against a facility—especially when a facility or company is knowingly violating their permit.

Through the ECHO website, you can search for RCRA facilities through a facility name or recent enforcement activity, as well.

The Safe Drinking Water Act is our final act in ECHO and we'll briefly talk about it today. As our tools expand, look for more tutorials. The Safe Drinking Water Act was signed in 1974.

With more than 170,000 public water systems, it is important for States and the EPA to work together to implement safe drinking water. The Safe Drinking Water Act applies to public water sources such as rivers, lakes, reservoirs, springs, ground water wells, and distribution centers. It does not apply to private wells or bottled water.

A 1996 amendment addresses various levels of water protection including protecting the source water, training operators at a cleaning and distribution center, funding appropriate decontamination, and increasing public information about drinking water. The Safe Drinking Water Act also sets the maximum contaminant levels of pollutions and required treatment techniques, and gives enforcement authority to EPA and State governments ranging from notifications of a permit violation to civil or criminal action against violators.

To search for Safe Drinking Water facilities you can also look for facility characteristics or current violations. For all of these acts, EPA tracks enforcement actions and lawsuits against facilities. Through this, inspectors are able to ensure that corrective action is taking place or further enforcement action is applied.

That's a quick introduction to the four major acts in ECHO. ECHO captures permits, violations, and enforcement actions against facilities for the public and government alike to utilize. If you want to learn more about each act, feel free to explore the EPA website and also visit echo.epa.gov. Right now, we will answer some questions.

Hi, this is Rebecca Kane, I work with Jessie at the EPA, and if you have any questions about ECHO or about the material, please enter it into the question box. And we'll be happy to answer those.

So, Jessie, the first question we had is how, is how often data are updated in ECHO?

That's a great question. Rebecca?

I'll just go ahead and answer that. So, it varies, the data from most of our national data systems that support these statutes are updated on a weekly basis over the weekend. The Safe Drinking Water Act data are the exception. They're updated quarterly.

Our next question is whether you can search for violations by state instead of by facility name.

You can; you can search by state. You can do a basic zip code or state search and that's definitely something I'm going to do in a demonstration in April. Show you how to actually find a facility.

Okay, great. And then the next question, I'll go ahead and answer it. How far back does ECHO data go? So, on the website, on the facility searches, Jessie showed a few screen captures of those, that data goes back five years. We do have, like in our ECHO system that supports the website, we have data back as far as it goes in our national systems which in some cases is back to the 90s. That data can be downloaded if you're very interested in data analysis and have database software, we do have a data downloads page where you can download history by statute. I'm sorry, data download by statute back for the full history of the data.

Okay, our next question is does the Safe Drinking Water Act data link to the SDWIS database? So, yeah, so the answer to that is, it's similar for the four different statutes that Jessie discussed is that, we at EPA have a national program data system where data from all the regulators, whether they be at a local agency of a state or at EPA, the data comes in to the national system and then ECHO extracts data from those systems. So, ECHO is like a data analysis and presentation site. It is not the system of record. The Safe Drinking Water Information System that somebody, that this person, asked about does get data from state systems. It goes into the national EPA system and then ECHO extracts that data on a quarterly basis.

Okay, so, the next question is where does ECHO data come from? I sort of just answered that. As Jessie alluded to, we'll be having monthly trainings and we'll definitely get into more the detail of data itself. ECHO data is extracted, as I said, from EPA national systems. The data in the national systems often come from the state or local environmental agency regulators and it either goes into a state system and then travels up to the EPA systems or entered directly into the EPA system.

Somebody asked whether there's tutorials on how to use ECHO. We did answer that question in the question box and there's a web link there, but I would just go ahead and mention that if you go to the ECHO home page, echo.epa.gov, there is a link to tutorials and they're just short YouTube videos that give you a quick introduction into actually using and navigating ECHO.

Also, at the end, we have a survey and in the survey there's an opportunity to list specifically what kinds of tutorials you'd be interested in seeing and we'll take that into consideration over the next coming months. That will be at the end.

We have a question about the relationship between Envirofacts and ECHO. Envirofacts is another EPA website and data system that provides data from EPA national systems. So, they're kind of, ECHO and Envirofacts are somewhat similar in that they're both kind of data warehouse, and presentation systems that are taking data from the EPA national systems of record and presenting them--presenting the data-- to the public. Envirofacts is more comprehensive than ECHO. Envirofacts is intended to display as much EPA data as possible whereas ECHO is primarily focused on enforcement and compliance, the enforcement and compliance status data that EPA has. ECHO does actually use some Envirofacts data so that we're not replicating work and ECHO does draw some of its supporting data from Envirofacts like data on Toxics Release Inventory and greenhouse gas data, for example.

Somebody asked how often the NPDES, the Clean Water NPDES data is updated, and that is weekly.

So, another question we have is can you search the data by individual parameters such as zinc. So, I'm assuming that's talking about NPDES parameters under the Clean Water Act. The answer to that is yes, you can. ECHO has again, as I was saying, as we had mentioned a couple times, we'll be having more in-depth trainings and webinars that would address the various search criteria in ECHO. Besides the basic searches that Jessie talked about there are much more in-depth ways that you can search for facilities, such as by pollutants discharged.

We have a question on whether all state data are included. The answer is no. EPA has agreements with states on the data that are required to be submitted. So, a lot of states and local environmental agencies have their own data systems in which they enter data and then a portion of that data is sent to the EPA. Some of the key data like the types of compliance monitoring and when they're done any potential violations that are found and dates of any enforcement actions.

Another question that might interest people is, can users download historical data for a particular EPA ID number? So, the answer to that is yes. If you go to any of the facility searches that Jessie talked about, you could just--if you already know an EPA ID number--you could just put that in and then you'll get results just for that facility.

We have two questions about correcting inaccurate data. So, if you are reviewing data at a facility what could you do if you see something that you think is incorrect? So, what you would need to do is, and oh, let me just say that this is addressed in one of our tutorials that Jessie's going to show the link to in a

little bit. If you go the--we have a tutorial on reporting an error and that will show you exactly how to do it. So, we have a process after you do a facility report and you're reviewing the detailed report on that facility, there is a link at the top of the facility report that says "Report Error" and you would just click that and then follow the directions and give as much information as you can on what is wrong and a data steward will get back to you.

We have a question on whether people are automatically signed up for future training events. I think, I don't think so. I guess, let me think about that for a second. No, so I think what we would do is, we'll send out information on trainings through the same avenues that we did for this one. If you are interested in being on our email list on the ECHO home page there's a link to sign up for the ECHO listserv and I would just ask that you sign up there and then you'll always get training announcements, but you're not automatically signed up for future events because you signed up for this.

No, definitely just check out--the link should be showing right now. It's echo.epa.gov/help/training. And there'll be a link for a future webinar and then also like Rebecca said, through the email.

We have a question about who to contact if you have more questions. On the ECHO website, on every page--almost every page-on the top right there's a link that says "Contact Us." So I would encourage you if you have comments or questions or ideas for future webinars to please utilize that link.

We have a question about when ECHO was developed. The, I'll just give you the easy answer. It was first launched to the public in 2002. November of 2002. As a--under a review period and we took comments and addressed them and then it was launched as a final site in 2003. It went through some periods of development before that.

We have a bunch of questions on the questions box, as I'm scrolling through them. I just want to let you know that if I do miss your question, we will respond to you by email.

We have a question about whether you can search ECHO by type of industry. You are able to do that. It takes a little bit of analysis, but on each of the ECHO facility searches that Jessie showed, there is the option to enter an SIC code or an NAICS code. These are numbers--these are codes--that are created to describe different industries in the country. So, you would use those numbers to search for industry, but there are links to look up on ECHO facility searches so you don't have to know the number. You can look up the industry and then populate the number that way.

And that's something that we can go into more detail in as well.

I apologize again for the silence. I'm just running through the questions. I appreciate everybody's thoughtful questions and comments. Some of these we've already answered.

We have a question on whether other federal agencies are included in ECHO. ECHO includes data on any facility that's regulated under these statutes that Jessie discussed. So, to the extent that any federal agency has facilities that would be regulated by EPA then their data would also be in ECHO.

We have a good question about whether you can get bulletins sent to you about potential violations in your area. So, this is a good question because it's something that we've wanted to do for a while, to enhance ECHO so that you don't have to come to the website, that you could tell us what information you want and we would send it to you. So, I would just say it's definitely in our queue of enhancements we would like to address, but it kind of depends on resources and other work that needs to get done.

So, I just, I want to say that I appreciate people giving us ideas for enhancements and that we definitely take that seriously and put it on a wish list to take care of when we can.

Yeah we had that--actually somebody mentioned that twice. So, we'll definitely keep that on our list.

So, at this point we've addressed a good number of questions and I don't want to hold everybody on the line. I appreciate questions and if, like I said, if I've missed them then we will definitely get back to you by email.

Thanks for being here to answer questions, Rebecca. So, our next presentation will be in April. You can in the meantime visit the ECHO website for more trainings and tutorials. I saw a lot of questions about demos and we definitely have a plan to be doing demos. You can also see recorded demos on the ECHO website. Immediately following this slide, a survey will come on your screen and in that survey you can fill out tools or information that you might be interested in learning about ECHO and that will help us plan future trainings. I want to make sure that you guys are getting the training that you want and will help you out. So, be sure to fill out that survey. And thank you for your interest today. I know it was information heavy, but we will be getting into demonstrations after this. So, I look forward to working with you guys next month. Thank you.