



# Guidelines for Ensuring the Quality of Information Disseminated to the Public

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#### I. Introduction

In Section 515(a) of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001 (Public Law 106-554; HR 5658), Congress directed the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue government-wide guidelines that "provide policy and procedural guidance to Federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information (including statistical information) disseminated by Federal agencies." OMB's guidelines were published in the Federal Register on February 22, 2002 (67 FR 8452), directing agencies subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act (44 USC 3502) to:

"Issue guidelines ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information (including statistical information) disseminated by their agency, no later than October 1, 2002.

"Establish administrative mechanisms allowing affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information that does not comply with OMB guidelines.

"Report to the Director of OMB the number and nature of complaints received by the agency regarding the accuracy of information and how such complaints were handled by the agency."

This document constitutes the USGS response to the directive from OMB. The USGS guidelines and complaint process will apply to all information disseminated on or after October 1, 2002. Information disseminated prior to October 1, 2002, but not archived and still being used in a decision-making process is not exempt from these guidelines. Information records disseminated from studies completed and archived before October 1, 2002 are exempt from the Guidelines.

All OMB and the final Department of the Interior (DOI) guidelines and standards are incorporated by reference into these USGS guidelines. The information quality definitions published by OMB and DOI guidelines also are adopted as USGS's definitions for information quality.

## II. USGS Vision and Mission

### 1. Vision

The USGS is a world leader in the natural sciences through its scientific excellence and responsiveness to society's needs.

### 2. Mission

The mission of the USGS is to serve the Nation by providing reliable scientific information to: 1) describe and understand the Earth; 2) minimize loss of life and property from natural disasters; 3) manage water, biological, energy, and mineral resources; and 4) enhance and protect the quality of life.

## III. USGS Information Quality Guidelines

### 1. Overview of USGS Information Quality Guidelines

The USGS provides unbiased, objective scientific information upon which other entities may base judgments. Since the bureau's inception in 1879, the USGS has maintained comprehensive internal and external procedures for ensuring the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of data, analyses, and scientific conclusions. These Information Quality Guidelines cover all information produced by the USGS in any medium, including data sets, web pages, maps, audiovisual presentations, USGS-published reports, or reports by USGS authors published by others. These USGS guidelines also provide an administrative procedure for persons to seek correction of information maintained and disseminated by the USGS that they believe does not comply with these guidelines. Factors, such as imminent threats to public health or homeland security, statutory or court-ordered, or circumstances beyond our control, may limit or preclude applicability of these guidelines.

### 2. USGS Review Process

USGS information is published in many media, and because of the scientific nature of the information, it passes through many quality assurance reviews, including peer review, to ensure the utility, objectivity, and integrity of the information. These quality review standards are published by the USGS at: <http://www.usgs.gov/usgs-manual/500/500-9.html>.

### 3. USGS Influential Information

"Influential information" means that the USGS can reasonably determine that dissemination of the information could have a clear and substantial impact on important public policy or management decisions of others. USGS recognizes that the information it disseminates includes scientific data or information that can influence policy decisions. All USGS data meet a very high standard of quality.

USGS scientific information is subject to a high degree of transparency about data and methods to facilitate the reproducibility of such information by other qualified scientists. This information has a high degree of transparency regarding (1) the source of the data used, (2) the various assumptions employed, (3) the methods applied, and (4) the statistical procedures employed. The degree of rigor with which each of these factors is presented and discussed is scaled as appropriate. If access to data and methods cannot occur due to compelling interests such as privacy, trade secrets, intellectual property and other confidentiality protections, USGS will, to the extent

practicable, verify information and document that verification steps were taken.

#### 4. Paperwork Reduction Act

All USGS offices will make use of OMB's Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) clearance process to help improve the quality of information that the bureau collects and disseminates to the public. All proposed collections of information that are disseminated to the public should demonstrate in their PRA clearances submissions to OMB that the proposed collection of information will result in information that will be collected, maintained and used in a way consistent with the DOI and OMB Quality Information Guidelines.

#### 5. USGS Third-Party Data

The USGS is taking and will continue to take steps to ensure that the quality and transparency of data, metadata, and information provided by external sources are sufficient for the intended use. Reference to and use of third party information is complex and requires extensive collaboration with the scientific and technical community and other external data providers. Third party data may carry inherent accuracy weaknesses in that the data content often cannot be checked or nor their accuracy controlled. Instances where the information relied on is not verifiable, the source must be made transparent to the public, and such information will not be subject to the guidelines.

Metadata (information that characterizes and describes data) are one tool used by the USGS to maximize information quality, utility, objectivity, and transparency of third-party data by playing a key role in describing the specific quality procedures that were followed, as well as documenting methods and techniques used in studies. USGS conforms to key national standards for metadata (OMB Circular A-16, currently under revision. Executive Order 12906 will be incorporated into the revised OMB Circular A-16).

### IV. Information Correction

#### 1. Administrative Process

Information quality inquiries should be made by contacting the Geographic Information Office, U.S. Geological Survey, 159 National Center, Reston VA 20192, email: [InfoQual@usgs.gov](mailto:InfoQual@usgs.gov), phone: 703-648-5780. The GIO maintains records on each inquiry and sends a fiscal year report to DOI by November 30, of each year describing the number, nature, and resolution of inquiries. The GIO shall provide the inquiry to the appropriate USGS Discipline. The USGS discipline receiving an inquiry through the GIO, copies all inquiry responses to the GIO office.

#### 2. Requirements

A request for information correction must include the following:

- A written statement that the person is seeking correction of information disseminated by the USGS and the specific reasons for believing the information is in error for failure to meet OMB or DOI standards, along with supporting documentation, if any.
- Name, mailing address, telephone number, email address (if applicable), and organizational affiliation, if any, of the individual making the complaint. Organizations submitting a complaint should identify one individual to serve as the primary contact.
- A detailed description of the specific material in question, including where the material is located (that is, publication title, date, and publication number, if any, or the website and web page address).
- The complainant should use the subject line, "Complaint About Information Quality," so that it may be clearly recognizable to those managing the process.
- A detailed description of the specific material in question, including where the material is located (that is, publication title, date, and publication number, if any, or the website and web page address).
- A description of how the person submitting the complaint is affected by the information error.
- The specific recommendations for corrective action.

#### 3. Evaluation

Within 10 business days, the USGS will notify the complainant of inquiry receipt. Within 60 calendar days of receipt, the appropriate discipline will evaluate the information in question. If the USGS determines that the correction request is without merit, the complainant will be notified. If the USGS determines that the request has merit, the USGS will take reasonable steps to respond to the complainant's request and will notify the complainant of this intent and the corrective steps proposed. The USGS will determine the schedule and procedure for correcting any challenged information that it has deemed as having an error.

A second complaint received before the issuance of a 60 calendar day evaluation notice for an overlapping complaint under review will be treated with simultaneous consideration, and the second complainant will be notified within 10 business days that an analysis is in progress and advised of its status. The first and any subsequent complaints will be combined and a combined 60 calendar day finding will be issued.

If a second identical complaint on the same subject is received any time after a 60 calendar day notice has been issued, then the second complaint will require a new and separate review. Unless substantial new information has been submitted, the 60 calendar day finding for the earlier request shall suffice.

#### 4. Appeal Procedure

If complainants are dissatisfied with a decision regarding their inquiry, they may appeal the decision to the Director, U.S. Geological Survey, through the Geographic Information Office.

Appeals must contain the following:

- An indication that the person is seeking an appeal of a USGS decision on a previously submitted request for a correction of information, including the date of the original submission and date of USGS decision.
- Name, mailing address, telephone number, email address (if applicable), and organizational affiliation, if any, of the individual making the complaint appeal. Organizations submitting an appeal should identify one individual as the primary contact.
- An explanation of why the appealing person or organization disagrees with the USGS decision, and if possible, a recommendation of corrective action.
- A copy of the original request for correction of information and the original response.

#### V. Legal Effect

These guidelines are intended only to improve the internal management of the U.S. Geological Survey relating to information quality. Nothing in these guidelines is intended to create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable by law or equity by a party against the United States, its agencies, its offices, or any other person. These guidelines do not provide any right to judicial review.

#### VI. [Information Correction Form](#)

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*U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Geological Survey, Reston, VA,  
USA*

*URL [http://www.usgs.gov/info\\_qual/index.html](http://www.usgs.gov/info_qual/index.html)*

*Contact: [InfoQual@usgs.gov](mailto:InfoQual@usgs.gov)*

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