

The Role of Information in Environmental Regulation:

Science in the Service of Society?

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Information in Environmental Regulation

- “Information” is fundamental
- Source: usually physical sciences
- Raw material for decision-making process
- Gives rise to FOI, public access to information
- Advent of ICT: greater scope for information processing in environmental regulation

Promise of ICT for Environmental Regulation

- More rigorous
- Large-scale tracking of pollution emissions
- 'Data mining'
- Information dissemination
- Better understanding, visualisation, forecasting...

Promise of ICT for Environmental Regulation

- Expands scope and span of control
- Improves functioning of markets
- More specialised, decentralised and sophisticated regulatory organizations
- Transparency can help avoid distortions of the political process

Science, policy and law connection

- Not a linear or coherent relationship
- Inadequate scientific literacy ('bad science')
- Scientific models used in legislation may not be
 - accurate
 - up-to-date
 - 'objective'

Problems with Information in Environmental Regulation

- Information 'Quality' in the regulatory process: data as a political football
- Impact of Information?
 - Toxics Release Inventory shows potential
 - But success due to under-reporting, gaming?

Thematic Issues

- Paradox of transparency: more can be less
- ‘Agile’ regulation?
- More iterative processes
- How to gather enough data?
- “Mash-ups”
- Privacy

Conclusion

- Development of “*informational governance*”?
 - ‘the idea that information is fundamentally restructuring processes, institutions and practices of environmental governance’ (Mol)
- But inequalities of power persist
- The state remains relevant
- Expensive infrastructure required