NEPA and the "Beneficial Impact" EIS

Shaun A. Goho
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ABSTRACT

The National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) requires that federal agencies prepare an environmental impact statement (“EIS”) for any major federal action “significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.” Some courts—in dicta—and some commentators have suggested that agencies must prepare an EIS for actions that will have significant beneficial impacts on the environment but no significant adverse impacts. In a recent case, the Ninth Circuit declined to address this question, but suggested that there was a circuit split on the issue.

In this Article, I argue that agencies do not need to prepare such a “Beneficial Impact” EIS. First, there is actually no circuit split on the issue. All courts that have directly addressed the question have found that there is no Beneficial Impact EIS requirement. Cases that have been cited in support of such a requirement are either distinguishable or make such statements only in dicta. Second, while the statute does not directly address this question, some regulations and guidance indicate that an EIS should not be required under these circumstances. Third, the policies underlying NEPA are in tension with a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement. Such a requirement would produce unnecessary cost and delay for environmentally beneficial projects and create perverse incentives for federal agencies without any compensating informational benefits.

INTRODUCTION

In its 2010 decision in Humane Society v. Locke, the Ninth Circuit raised, but ultimately declined to address, what it described as “an issue of first impression in this circuit: whether NEPA requires an agency to prepare an EIS when an action has a significant beneficial impact but no

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1 626 F.3d 1040 (9th Cir. 2010).
significant adverse impact on the environment.” Humane Society is not alone. Several other courts have noted the issue but have not decided it. For example, in 2006 the Fifth Circuit declined to rule on the issue. Similarly, a district court recently stated that “the Tenth Circuit has not squarely addressed whether a project with a purely beneficial but significant effect requires an EIS.”

Some commentators have also asserted, or assumed, that an environmental impact statement (“EIS”) is required under the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) when an action will have significant, beneficial environmental impacts. Charles Eccleston’s *NEPA and Environmental Planning*, for example, says that “an action that would result in a significant beneficial impact (with no significant adverse impacts) may still be subject to an EIS.” Similarly, Daniel Mandelker’s *NEPA Law and Litigation* treatise notes that while “[o]ne court held . . . that an impact statement is necessary for a project that has beneficial effects only if it also has significant adverse environmental effects . . . a broad reading of the statute shows it also requires agencies to examine the beneficial effects of their projects.”

In this Article, I argue that NEPA should not be construed to require that agencies prepare an EIS when a major federal action is anticipated to have significant, beneficial environmental impacts, but no significant, adverse environmental impacts. Neither the statute, nor the Council on Environmental Quality (“CEQ”) regulations, nor judicial precedent require the preparation of such a “Beneficial Impact” EIS. Moreover, the policies underlying NEPA are best served by an interpretation of the statute that does not impose such a requirement. To the contrary, a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement would undermine the goals of NEPA, encourage gamesmanship by regulated industries, and create perverse

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2 Id. at 1056.
3 See Coliseum Square Ass’n v. Jackson, 465 F.3d 215, 239 (5th Cir. 2006).
5 See, e.g., Neal McAliley, *NEPA and Assessment of Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, 41 ENVTL. L. REP. NEWS & ANALYSIS 10197, 10198 (2011) (“For proposed actions with significant impacts (regardless of whether those impacts are negative or beneficial), an agency must prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS).”); Dinah Bear, *NEPA at 19: A Primer on an “Old” Law with Solutions to New Problems*, 19 ENVTL. L. REP. NEWS & ANALYSIS 10,060, 10,064 (1989) (“One frequently overlooked point is that the NEPA standard of significance applies to both beneficial and adverse impacts.”).
incentives for federal agencies conducting NEPA analyses. As a result, courts faced with this question should address it directly to make it clear that agencies need not prepare Beneficial Impact EISs. The CEQ should also consider promulgating guidance to clarify that the preparation of a Beneficial Impact EIS is not required under NEPA.

My proposal is a narrow one. I am not suggesting, for example, that any category of “environmentally beneficial” projects be exempted from NEPA. Instead, my proposal addresses only the question of which actions should require preparation of a full EIS; environmentally beneficial actions would have to go through the environmental assessment (“EA”)\(^8\) or categorical exclusion (“CE”)\(^9\) process to ensure that they do not have significant adverse effects.

Nor do I propose that courts should accept, without question, an agency’s characterization of its action as environmentally beneficial. To the contrary, as is required under current case law, an “agency must prepare an EIS if substantial questions are raised as to whether a project . . . may cause significant degradation of some human environmental factor.”\(^{10}\) In addition, I do not argue that actions with both significant beneficial and adverse impacts should be exempted from the EIS requirement, even if the beneficial impacts outweigh the detrimental ones. CEQ’s regulations clearly require the preparation of an EIS under these circumstances.\(^{11}\)

\(^8\) An environmental assessment is a concise public document for which a Federal agency is responsible that serves to:
(1) Briefly provide sufficient evidence and analysis for determining whether to prepare an environmental impact statement or a finding of no significant impact;\(^{12}\)
(2) Aid an agency’s compliance with the Act when no environmental impact statement is necessary;\(^{13}\)
(3) Facilitate preparation of a statement when one is necessary.
40 C.F.R. § 1508.9 (2010).

\(^9\) A categorical exclusion is a category of actions which do not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment and which have been found to have no such effect in procedures adopted by a Federal agency in implementation of [CEQ’s] regulations . . . and for which, therefore, neither an environmental assessment nor an environmental impact statement is required.
40 C.F.R. § 1508.4.

\(^{10}\) Ctr. for Biological Diversity v. Nat’l Highway Traffic Safety Admin., 538 F.3d 1172, 1219 (9th Cir. 2008) (alteration in original) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted).

\(^{11}\) 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)(1).
Nevertheless, the issue is still a significant one. A lot rides on an agency’s decision whether to prepare a full EIS. For example, a 2003 report by the federal NEPA Task Force found that the preparation of a typical EIS costs between $250,000 and $2,000,000 and takes between one and six years to complete.\textsuperscript{12} By contrast, “small” EAs typically cost $5000 to $20,000 and take between two weeks and two months to complete, and “large” EAs for “controversial or high-profile projects” typically cost $50,000 to $200,000 and take between nine and eighteen months to complete.\textsuperscript{13} Because so much depends on the choice between an EA and an EIS, “[t]he preparation of an EA, rather than an EIS, is the most common source of conflict and litigation under NEPA.”\textsuperscript{14}

In particular, a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement could prove a substantial impediment to the development of renewable energy projects. Such projects are essential if the nation is to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels and thereby reduce the impacts of global climate change.\textsuperscript{15} Across the country, however—from the Cape Wind project off Cape Cod to solar power projects in the Mojave Desert—some groups have been invoking the environmental laws to oppose renewable energy proposals.\textsuperscript{16} If such projects will genuinely cause significant adverse environmental impacts, then it is appropriate to require an EIS during the project planning process. But it would be absurd to require the preparation of a full EIS, with the attendant cost and delay, for such projects merely because of the significant environmental benefits they will create.

In Part I, I explain that the statements in Humane Society v. Locke and other cases notwithstanding, there is actually no circuit split regarding whether an agency must prepare a Beneficial Impact EIS. The only circuit court decision to address the question directly rejected this proposition, and the other cases are distinguishable or made statements


\textsuperscript{13} Id. at 65.

\textsuperscript{14} Council on Envtl. Quality, The National Environmental Policy Act: A Study of Its Effectiveness After Twenty-Five Years (1997), available at http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/nepa25fn.pdf; accord Bear, supra note 5, at 10,064 (then–CEQ General Counsel observing that “disagreement about whether a proposed action has ‘significant effects’ has been the most frequent reason for NEPA litigation over the past 19 years”).


supporting a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement only in dicta. In Part II, I discuss the statutory text, relevant regulations and guidance, and policy arguments. While the statutory text is ambiguous, the regulations, guidance, and policy arguments support my argument. In Parts III and IV, I consider and rebut some counterarguments, which suggest either that a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement causes no harm that is not already addressed by other doctrines or that such a requirement is desirable.

I. THERE IS NO CIRCUIT SPLIT

As one reason for refusing to decide the question, both Humane Society and Decker suggested that there is a circuit split on the Beneficial Impact EIS issue. A review of the decisions, however, demonstrates that there is, in fact, no split regarding the need for a Beneficial Impact EIS. The only decisions that have directly addressed the question have held that there is no such requirement. The cases cited in Humane Society and elsewhere as supporting such a requirement either made the statement only in dicta, or addressed other questions, such as when an EIS must be supplemented and when beneficial impacts must be analyzed in an independently necessary EIS because of significant adverse impacts.

A. The Only Cases Directly on Point Have Found that an EIS Is Not Required

Courts routinely describe the test for a “significant” environmental impact purely in terms of the magnitude of a proposed action’s adverse impacts. For example, the Ninth Circuit has explained that “[a]n EIS...
must be prepared if substantial questions are raised as to whether a project . . . may cause significant degradation of some human environmental factor."21 Such cases properly recognize that the focus of NEPA should be on understanding, reducing, and eliminating the adverse environmental effects of federal actions. Given that the Beneficial Impacts EIS issue was not before the court in these decisions, however, such statements are dicta and do not resolve the question.22

Only one circuit court decision has directly addressed whether an agency must prepare a Beneficial Impact EIS, and it correctly concluded that the agency need not. In Friends of Fiery Gizzard v. Farmers Home Administration,23 the Sixth Circuit addressed a challenge to a decision of the Farmers Home Administration ("FmHA") not to prepare an EIS for its decision to fund a small dam project.24 The dam, on Big Fiery Gizzard Creek, near Tracy City, Tennessee, would create a fifty-seven-acre reservoir in a shallow valley.25 The reservoir and accompanying water treatment plant would provide a source of drinking water for the town of Tracy City.26 Because the FmHA was providing funding for the project, it completed an EA, in which it concluded that "[t]here will be no significant adverse impacts in connection with this project."27 In fact, the FmHA suggested that the project would "have a positive impact on the living environment of the residents of the area" by providing them "with a dependable, sanitary water supply."28

21 Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project v. Blackwood, 161 F.3d 1208, 1212 (9th Cir. 1998) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted) (emphasis added); see also Hanly v. Kleindienst, 471 F.2d 823, 830–31 (2d Cir. 1972) (holding that the significance determination depends on "at least two relevant factors: (1) the extent to which the action will cause adverse environmental effects in excess of those created by existing uses in the area affected by it, and (2) the absolute quantitative adverse environmental effects of the action itself, including the cumulative harm that results from its contribution to existing adverse conditions or uses in the affected area") (emphasis added); Students Challenging Regulatory Agency Procedures v. United States, 346 F. Supp. 189, 201 (D.D.C. 1972) (holding that an EIS "is required whenever the action arguably will have an adverse environmental impact") (three-judge court), rev’d on other grounds, 412 U.S. 669 (1973).

22 See, e.g., Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project, 161 F.3d at 1216; Students Challenging Regulatory Agency Procedures, 346 F. Supp. at 201.

23 61 F.3d 501 (6th Cir. 1995).

24 Id.

25 Id. at 503.

26 Id.

27 Id. (alteration in original) (internal quotation marks omitted).

28 Id.
Several environmental groups, including the Friends of Fiery Gizzard and the Sierra Club, challenged FmHA’s compliance with NEPA. Before the district court, the plaintiffs argued that the EA’s analysis of adverse environmental impacts was inadequate in several respects. On appeal, however, the plaintiffs primarily pressed their remaining claim, which was that FmHA needed to prepare an EIS because the EA had demonstrated that the project would have significant, beneficial environmental impacts. In particular, they argued that the plain language of NEPA required an EIS for any “major Federal action[] significantly affecting the quality of the human environment,” and did not distinguish between significant adverse and significant beneficial effects.

The Sixth Circuit concluded that no EIS was required. The court began by explaining that the statute had to “be read in the light of the implementing regulations.” Both CEQ’s general regulations and FmHA’s agency-specific regulations prescribe the use of EAs “as ‘a screening device . . . [that] allows agencies with limited resources to focus on truly important federal actions.’ ” The CEQ regulations establish criteria for identifying “significant” environmental impacts. The court in Friends of Fiery Gizzard emphasized that these regulations required an agency to consider the “intensity” of an action, which the regulations defined as “the severity of [the] impact.” In the court’s view “[t]his choice of adjectives is significant . . . ; one speaks of the severity of adverse impacts, not beneficial impacts.

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30 See id. at 721–23 (discussing plaintiffs’ arguments that the EA “had not sufficiently examined the potential effect of the impoundment on the quality of the water in the Big Fiery Gizzard Creek,” that the EA had an “inadequate . . . alternatives analysis,” that FmHA was biased, and “that there was inadequate documentation of several of the conclusions reached in the EA”).
31 Friends of Fiery Gizzard, 61 F.3d at 504.
32 Id. (quoting 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(C)) (internal quotation marks omitted).
33 Id. at 505–06.
34 Id. at 504.
35 Id. (alterations in original) (quoting Preservation Coalition, Inc. v. Pierce, 667 F.2d 851, 858 (9th Cir. 1982)).
36 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27 (2010).
37 Friends of Fiery Gizzard, 61 F.3d at 504 (quoting 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)) (internal quotation marks omitted).
38 Id. The court also quoted portions of CEQ’s regulations that required agencies “‘to make the NEPA process more useful to decisionmakers and the public,’ not less useful; ‘to reduce paperwork and the accumulation of extraneous background data,’ not expand
The court also suggested that a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement would be inconsistent with the purposes of NEPA. In particular, it questioned how “the delays and costs associated with the preparation of an [EIS]” would “stimulate the health and welfare” of the residents of Tracy City, given that the EIS “would not even arguably be required were it not for the project’s positive impact on health and welfare.”

“It would be anomalous to conclude that an environmental impact statement is necessitated by an assessment which identifies beneficial impacts while forecasting no significant adverse impacts, when the same assessment would not require the preparation of an impact statement if the assessment predicted no significant beneficial effect.”

Several district court decisions have reached the same result as in *Friends of Fiery Gizzard*. There is therefore a clear body of case law holding that Beneficial Impact EISs should not be required. As I will discuss below, there are no cases that directly reach a contrary result.

**B. Some Cases Are Distinguishable**

Some of the other cases that are cited as supporting the proposition that an agency must prepare an EIS when an action will have only significant, beneficial environmental impacts actually involve different issues. First, some cases involve the decision whether to prepare a supplemental them; and ‘to emphasize real environmental issues and alternatives,’ not fanciful ones.” *Id.* at 505 (quoting 40 C.F.R. § 1500.2(b)).

39 *Id.* at 505 (quoting 42 U.S.C. § 4321).

40 *Id.*


42 The Ninth Circuit has also implicitly rejected the related argument that an EIS is required when a proposal will have no significant environmental impacts, but an alternative would have significant beneficial impacts. In *National Wildlife Federation v. Espy*, 45 F.3d 1337 (9th Cir. 1995), the plaintiffs argued that the FmHA needed to prepare an EIS when it transferred title for a wetland to the Farm Credit Bank without imposing a wetlands conservation requirement, *id.* at 1343. The Ninth Circuit held that no EIS was required because the transfer preserved the environmental status quo, which included cattle grazing on the wetland. *Id.* This case presents a version of the baseline problem, discussed in text accompanying notes 210–16, below.
EIS. Others involve an agency’s assertion that its actions are exempt from NEPA compliance altogether. Finally, another set of cases hold only that an EIS may be necessary even when an action may have net beneficial effects. As explained below, these situations raise distinct issues and do not compel a similar outcome when an agency is deciding whether to prepare an initial EIS.

1. Supplemental EIS

A pair of cases frequently cited as supporting a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement actually involved the distinct issue of when an agency must prepare a supplemental EIS. In these cases, an initial EIS had been required because the project was anticipated to have significant adverse effects. When changes were made to the proposal to mitigate some of those effects, the question arose whether the significant beneficial effects of those mitigation measures required the preparation of a supplemental EIS. Because of the significantly different posture in which these cases arose, their conclusions that supplemental EISs were required to analyze beneficial impacts do not compel a similar result when an EA discloses that a project will have only significant beneficial impacts.

The first case is *Environmental Defense Fund v. Marsh.* This case involved the Army Corps of Engineers’ planning for the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway (the “TTW”), a 253-mile artificial waterway across parts of Mississippi and Alabama. The Corps first prepared an EIS for the TTW in 1971. In the subsequent years, the Corps made various changes to the proposed project, but did not complete a supplemental EIS. The Environmental Defense Fund (“EDF”) sued the Corps in 1976 to compel the supplementation of its environmental analysis.

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43 See infra Part I.B.1.
44 See infra Part I.B.2.
45 See infra Part I.B.3.
47 See Envtl. Def. Fund, 651 F.2d at 987; Nat’l Wildlife Fed’n, 721 F.2d at 771.
48 See Envtl. Def. Fund, 651 F.2d at 991; Nat’l Wildlife Fed’n, 721 F.2d at 782.
49 651 F.2d 983.
50 Id. at 986.
51 Id. at 987. The adequacy of that EIS was upheld in *Environmental Defense Fund v. Corps of Engineers,* 492 F.2d 1123 (5th Cir. 1974).
52 Envtl. Def. Fund, 651 F.2d at 988.
53 Id. at 990.
The Fifth Circuit concluded that several changes to the project were sufficiently large to require the preparation of a supplemental EIS.\(^{54}\) Most of these changes were likely to produce adverse environmental impacts.\(^{55}\) In addition, however, the court concluded that although there was evidence that two of the changes—the acquisition of additional land to mitigate the environmental impacts of the TTW and the chain-of-lakes design—could have significant adverse impacts, a supplemental EIS would be necessary even if the effects were beneficial: “[E]ven if the Corps was correct in deciding that the new land use will be beneficial in impact, a beneficial impact must nevertheless be discussed in an EIS, so long as it is significant. NEPA is concerned with all significant environmental effects, not merely adverse ones.”\(^{56}\)

*National Wildlife Federation v. Marsh*, decided by the Eleventh Circuit two years later, involved the similar decision of whether to prepare a supplemental EIS after the development of a mitigation plan for a proposal to build an artificial lake.\(^{57}\) The court, citing *Environmental Defense Fund v. Marsh*, held that a supplemental EIS was required because “appellants have shown that the Mitigation Plan involves a number of proposed project changes that are likely to have a significant, though beneficial, impact on the environment in and around the proposed lake.”\(^{58}\)

Based on these statements, some courts and commentators have cited *Environmental Defense Fund v. Marsh* and *National Wildlife Federation v. Marsh* as standing for the proposition that an agency must prepare an EIS when an action will have significant beneficial impacts.\(^{59}\) The cases are easily distinguishable, however. First, they dealt with the need for a supplemental EIS rather than the need for an EIS in the first place.\(^{60}\) As a result, it was uncontested in both cases that the action would

\(^{54}\) *Id.* at 992–96.

\(^{55}\) *See id.* (discussing the potential adverse impacts of changes in traffic levels and direction, increased land use, a new chain-of-lakes design, and straightening of the Tombigbee River).

\(^{56}\) *Id.* at 993; *see id.* at 994 (“Even if the Corps correctly decided that the design is superior in terms of overall environmental impact, that decision does not dispose of the material issue before the court: does the design have any significant new environmental impacts, whether beneficial or harmful?”).

\(^{57}\) 721 F.2d 767, 782 (11th Cir. 1983).

\(^{58}\) *Id.* at 783.

\(^{59}\) *See, e.g.*, Humane Soc’y v. Locke, 626 F.3d 1040, 1056 n.9 (9th Cir. 2010); Bear, *supra* note 5, at 10,064.

\(^{60}\) *See Envtl. Def. Fund*, 651 F.2d at 990; *Nat’l Wildlife Fed’n*, 721 F.2d at 770.
have at least some significant adverse impacts. The changes to the projects addressed by these opinions did not produce beneficial impacts independent of the adverse impacts they were intended to mitigate. The courts’ holdings thus follow from the requirement that an agency prepare an EIS for an action that will have both significant adverse impacts and significant beneficial impacts.

Second, the specific “benefits” alleged to flow from the amendments to the projects were actually reductions in harm compared to the initial proposal. The amendments were significant changes to the projects—thus necessitating a supplemental EIS—but in the context of a project that would still have significant adverse impacts. Third, in Environmental Defense Fund v. Marsh, the court found that most of the amendments to the project that triggered the need for a supplemental EIS would actually produce adverse impacts.

In sum, Environmental Defense Fund v. Marsh and National Wildlife Federation v. Marsh addressed situations in which an agency proposed an action with significant adverse impacts and then made some changes that might reduce some of those impacts. To require a supplemental EIS under these circumstances is consistent with NEPA’s purposes because it both provides the public with important new information about a project with significant adverse environmental impacts and forces the agency to re-weigh the costs and benefits of the proposal and alternatives to it in light of a significant change to the proposal. Requiring a supplemental EIS, however, says nothing about whether an agency must prepare an initial EIS for a project that would have no significant adverse impacts, but only significant beneficial ones. It is thus not surprising that, in a subsequent decision, the Fifth Circuit characterized Environmental Defense Fund v. Marsh as “determin[ing] only whether an EIS need discuss positive benefits.”

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61 See Envtl. Def. Fund, 651 F.2d at 987; Nat’l Wildlife Fed’n, 721 F.2d at 771.
62 See Envtl. Def. Fund, 651 F.2d at 992–95; Nat’l Wildlife Fed’n, 721 F.2d at 784.
63 See 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b)(1) (2010).
64 See Envtl. Def. Fund, 651 F.2d at 992–95; Nat’l Wildlife Fed’n, 721 F.2d at 784.
2. Claim of Absolute Exemption from NEPA

There are other cases that involve an agency’s assertion that the proposed action is exempt from NEPA altogether. Such assertions go back to the early days of the statute, when EPA took the position that all of its actions were exempt from NEPA.67 Similarly, the Fish and Wildlife Service (“FWS”) has argued that its decisions to list a species or designate critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act are exempt from NEPA.68

The courts have agreed with FWS regarding species listings,69 but the cases are split regarding critical habitat designations. The Ninth Circuit, in Douglas County v. Babbitt, held that the designation of critical habitat was exempt from NEPA.70 In Catron County Board of Commissioners v. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,71 however, the Tenth Circuit rejected the FWS’s argument that its decision to establish critical habitat for two threatened species (the loach minnow and spikedace) was exempt from NEPA compliance. In its discussion of this question, the court observed that whether “the Secretary believes the effects of a particular designation to be beneficial is . . . immaterial to his responsibility to comply with NEPA.”72

As a result of this statement, Catron County has been cited as requiring a Beneficial Impact EIS.73 That was not the holding of the case, however, and it is not clear that the Tenth Circuit said as much, even in dicta. First, the court was addressing only the argument that no NEPA compliance was required at all.74 Second, its explicit holding was that the

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67 See, e.g., Frederick R. Anderson, Jr., The National Environmental Policy Act, in FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAW 238, 256–67 (Erica L. Dolgin & Thomas G.P. Guilbert eds., 1974) (reviewing the debate about whether EPA had to comply with NEPA). While a blanket exemption for EPA has been rejected by the courts, Congress has specifically exempted many EPA actions from NEPA compliance, including most actions under the Clean Water Act and all actions under the Clean Air Act. See 33 U.S.C. § 1371(c)(1) (2006); 42 U.S.C. § 7607(e) (2006).
69 See id. at 841.
70 48 F.3d 1495, 1507–08 (9th Cir. 1995).
71 75 F.3d 1429, 1439 (10th Cir. 1996).
72 Id. at 1437.
74 Catron Cnty. Bd. of Comm’rs, 75 F.3d at 1439.
FWS had to prepare an EA.\textsuperscript{75} Third, the plaintiff had alleged potentially significant \textit{adverse} impacts from the designation of critical habitat.\textsuperscript{76}

An earlier case reaching the same result was \textit{Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc. v. Grant}.\textsuperscript{77} This case involved a stream channelization project in the Chicod Creek Watershed in North Carolina that was intended to reduce flooding.\textsuperscript{78} The Soil Conservation Service had not completed an EIS under NEPA, but argued that environmental analyses prepared pursuant to other laws eliminated the need for an EIS.\textsuperscript{79} The court rejected this argument.\textsuperscript{80} In particular, it stated that “[a]ny action that substantially affects, beneficially or detrimentally, the depth or course of streams, plant life, wildlife habitats, fish and wildlife, and the soil and air ‘significantly affects the quality of the human environment.’”\textsuperscript{81} It then noted that the sixty-six miles of stream channelization was projected to cause “a substantial reduction (ninety percent) in the standing crop of [the] fish population” and “significant lossage in wetland habitat.”\textsuperscript{82} As a result, the court concluded, the project “significantly affects the quality of the human environment.”\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Id}. (“When the environmental ramifications of such designations are unknown, we believe Congress intends that the Secretary prepare an EA leading to either a FONSI or an EIS.”) (emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{76} In particular, Catron County argued that the designation would “prevent continued governmental flood control efforts, thereby significantly affecting nearby farms and ranches, other privately owned land, local economies and public roadways and bridges.” \textit{Id}. at 1437–38. In a subsequent decision, the Tenth Circuit required an EIS for the designation of the Middle Rio Grande as critical habitat for the silvery minnow. Middle Rio Grande Conservancy Dist. v. Norton, 294 F.3d 1220, 1231 (10th Cir. 2002). In particular, the court concluded that the designation would result in a decrease of irrigated farmland and a possible loss of flood protection (the latter because the Bureau of Reclamation might have to use more expensive techniques to minimize harms to silvery minnow critical habitat and therefore not have sufficient money for flood control). \textit{Id}. at 1227–28. Even though the court’s decision is suspect—both because it is not clear that reductions in irrigated farmland should count as an environmental impact and because the causal chain leading to the potential loss of flood control was too attenuated—the court clearly saw these environmental impacts as detrimental. Therefore, \textit{Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District} did not endorse a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement.

\textsuperscript{77} 341 F. Supp. 356 (E.D.N.C. 1972).

\textsuperscript{78} \textit{Id}. at 361.

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Id}. at 365–66.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Id}. at 366.

\textsuperscript{81} \textit{Id}. at 367.

\textsuperscript{82} \textit{Id}. at 367.

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{See\ Natural Res. Def. Council}, 341 F. Supp. at 367.
Here too the agency had claimed that it was exempt from NEPA.\textsuperscript{84} In addition, the available alternatives, at that time, were to prepare an EIS or avoid NEPA altogether; the EA process had not yet been developed.\textsuperscript{85} Finally, the court’s statement about beneficial impacts was dicta, because it identified significant adverse environmental impacts as the basis for concluding that the project would significantly affect the human environment.\textsuperscript{86}

These cases, at most, stand for the proposition that an agency’s belief that a project will have only beneficial impacts does not exempt it from NEPA altogether. Such a result is reasonable. Given the risk of agency short-sightedness or tunnel vision, a court should not accept an agency’s assertion that an action will have only beneficial impacts unless there is some environmental analysis to back it up.\textsuperscript{87} For categories of actions that can be addressed together, a categorical exclusion might be appropriate. For actions that can be addressed only on a case-by-case basis, an EA can sort out the actions that will genuinely have only environmentally beneficial effects. Public involvement in these processes will reduce the likelihood that an agency is overlooking harmful effects from what it believes to be a beneficial action.

3. Cases Holding that an Agency Must Complete an EIS Even if the Project Will Have Net Beneficial Impacts

An agency must consider the beneficial environmental impacts of a project when completing an EA or EIS.\textsuperscript{88} The existence of these benefits—and even the conclusion that they will outweigh the detrimental impacts—does not, however, relieve the agency of the duty of preparing an EIS if the project does have significant adverse impacts.

This rule follows from the requirement in the CEQ regulations that “[a] significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes

\begin{footnotes}
\item[84] See id. at 364.
\item[87] See infra notes 217–21 and accompanying text.
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that on balance the effect will be beneficial.”89 In other words, the existence of both significant beneficial impacts and significant adverse impacts cannot be used as an excuse not to perform an EIS. The rule makes sense, given that environmental impacts are frequently incommensurable.90 If an action, for example, will reduce air pollution but increase water pollution, there is no easy way to conclude that the beneficial impacts “outweigh” the negative impacts.

A number of cases have held that an agency must prepare an EIS even when it believes that the significant beneficial environmental impacts of its action will outweigh the significant negative environmental impacts. For example, in Environmental Protection Information Center v. Blackwell,91 the Forest Service issued an EA and a Finding of No Significant Impact (“FONSI”) for a timber sale, concluding that an EIS was unnecessary.92 One of the issues raised by the timber sale was its potential impact on ecological connectivity—whether the timber harvesting would make it more difficult for animals, including endangered northern spotted owls, to travel between a wilderness area and a late-successional reserve.93 The Forest Service argued that, although the timber sale would have some adverse effects on connectivity, those effects would be outweighed by its positive impacts—namely that part of the project area was infested with a fungus and that, if the infected trees were not harvested, the disease would spread and ultimately render even more habitat unsuitable for owl foraging and dispersal.94

The court rejected this argument, which it characterized as being, “in essence, that the benefits of the DA Timber Sale will outweigh any adverse effects.”95 In support of its conclusion, it cited both the CEQ regulations and dicta from Friends of Fiery Gizzard, in which the court had observed that “[w]here [significant] adverse effects can be predicted, and the agency is in the position of having to balance the adverse effects

91 389 F. Supp. 2d 1174 (N.D. Cal. 2004).
92 Id. at 1181.
93 Id. at 1195. Late-successional reserves are federal lands designated by the Northwest Forest Plan of 1994 “to serve as habitat for late-successional and old-growth related species including the northern spotted owl.” Id. at 1180 (citation and internal quotation marks omitted).
94 Id. at 1197.
95 Id.
against the projected benefits, the matter must, under NEPA, be decided in light of an environmental impact statement.96

Similarly, another district court found that an agency could not avoid preparing an EIS in a case involving the issuance of permits and rights-of-way to allow two utilities to connect power plants in Mexico to the power grid in California.97 Granting the permits would produce significant detrimental impacts, including increases in the salinity of the Salton Sea, even though it would also “improve the biological and chemical quality” of the water entering the Sea.98

These cases should not be misconstrued as requiring a Beneficial Impact EIS.99 Instead, they require an EIS for an action that has both significant detrimental impacts and significant beneficial impacts. This requirement is consistent with my proposal and helps promote NEPA’s key purposes.

C. In Other Cases, the Statements Are Only Dicta

In another set of cases, the court did directly endorse the Beneficial Impact EIS requirement, but only in dicta. In some of these cases, the issue was not even before the court.100 In others, the court did hold that an EIS was required, but only when also faced with significant detrimental impacts.101 Either way, however, the court’s statement that significant beneficial impacts trigger the EIS requirement was dicta, and therefore not binding on subsequent courts, even in the same circuit.

For example, in Hiram Clarke Civic Club, Inc. v. Lynn,102 the plaintiffs challenged a federally funded housing project. The Department

98 Id. at 1023 n.22.
99 Cf. MANDELKER, supra note 7, at § 8.37 (citing Environmental Protection Information Center, amongst others, for the proposition that “[m]ost courts have held or suggested, however, that agencies must consider the beneficial impacts of their actions”).
102 476 F.2d 421.
of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") had determined that the housing project would produce no significant environmental impacts and that an EIS was therefore not required. The plaintiffs argued "that NEPA requires that an agency file an environmental impact statement if any significant environmental effects, whether adverse or beneficial, are forecast." The Fifth Circuit noted that "this contention raises serious questions" about HUD's decision not to prepare an EIS. In particular, the court suggested, “[a] close reading of Section 102(2)(C) in its entirety discloses that Congress was not only concerned with just adverse effects but with all potential environmental effects that affect the quality of the human environment.” Nevertheless, the court did not reverse HUD's decision, because the district court had held “a full evidentiary hearing” in which it had concluded that an EIS was not required.

Because they did not affect the result—HUD’s decision was upheld—the Fifth Circuit’s statements in Hiram Clarke are merely dicta. It is also unclear whether the court’s statements should be read as unequivocal support for the notion that an EIS is required based only on substantial beneficial effects; after all, the court said only that the plaintiffs’ argument “raise[d] serious questions” and that in section 102(2)(C), Congress was “concerned with” both adverse and beneficial effects. Thus, in a later case, the Fifth Circuit characterized its Hiram Clarke decision as one in which it “rhetorically considered the question, but ha[d] not arrived at an answer.”

Several other cases make brief references to a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement but do not actually impose such a requirement on the agency in the case before the court. In one case, the D.C. Circuit merely mentioned in passing that “DOE is correct in pointing out that both beneficial and adverse effects on the environment can be significant within the meaning of NEPA, and thus require an EIS.” Similarly, a 1979

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103 Id. at 426.
104 Id.
105 Id. at 427.
106 Id.
107 Id.
108 Hiram Clarke, 476 F.2d at 421.
109 Coliseum Square Ass’n v. Jackson, 465 F.3d 215, 239 (5th Cir. 2006).
110 Natural Res. Def. Council v. Herrington, 768 F.2d 1355, 1143 (D.C. Cir. 1985). DOE, in its brief, devoted only one paragraph to this argument, citing Hiram Clarke Civic Club, Inc. v. Lynn, 476 F.2d 421 (5th Cir. 1973) and National Wildlife Federation v. Marsh, 721 F.2d 767 (11th Cir. 1983) in support of its assertion that “[i]f a proposal will have significant environmental impacts either beneficial or adverse, an EIS is required.” Corrected
district court decision characterized EPA’s then-current regulations as requiring “that an EIS must be prepared when an EPA project will have a significant effect—beneficial or adverse—upon population, land use, fish and wildlife, floodplains, historic or archeological land sites, or endangered species.” On the facts before it, however, the court concluded that an EIS was not necessary for a proposed wastewater treatment plant because “the ultimate streamflow was to increase and . . . any detrimental effect on the streamflow was speculative.” Other cases state in dicta that significant beneficial impacts require preparation of an EIS but either also identify significant adverse impacts or indicate that the agency has already agreed to prepare an EIS.

None of these cases actually held that an agency had to prepare an EIS for an action that was expected to have only significant beneficial impacts. Instead, because their statements were only dicta, they do not create a split of authority with *Friends of Fiery Gizzard*. Therefore, there is no reason in the case law to hold an agency to a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement.

Moreover, even if some of the early cases discussed above, such as *Hiram Clarke* and *Natural Resources Defense Council v. Grant*, might be read to create a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement, changed circumstances since the early 1970s undercut their precedential value. First, those cases were decided before the CEQ issued its NEPA regulations in

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112 Id. at 324. In addition, the court appeared to mis-characterize the EPA regulation on which it relied. That regulation provided that “[a]n action with both beneficial and detrimental effects should be classified as having significant effects on the environment, even if EPA believes that the net effect will be beneficial. However, preference should be given to preparing EIS’s on proposed actions which, on balance, have adverse effects.” 40 C.F.R. § 6.200(a)(1) (1979) (emphasis added). The regulation thus said nothing about the situation in which an action would have only significant beneficial effects but no significant detrimental impacts. In fact, by indicating that the emphasis should be placed on preparing EISs for actions with “on balance . . . adverse effects,” the regulation is consistent with my proposal here that the EIS process should not be applied to actions with only significant beneficial impacts. *Id.*

1978.\textsuperscript{114} As explained below, those regulations support the conclusion that an EIS is required only when there are significant adverse environmental impacts.\textsuperscript{115} Second, the time and effort required to prepare an EIS had not yet become clear in the early 1970s. As the Sixth Circuit observed in \textit{Friends of Fiery Gizzard}, since that time, “there has been ‘a growing awareness that routinely requiring such statements would use up resources better spent in careful study of actions likely to harm the environment substantially.’”\textsuperscript{116} Third, the development of the EA process has meant that exempting a project from the EIS requirement does not mean exempting it from NEPA altogether.

II. \textsc{Environmental Impact Statements Should Not Be Required Based Only on Significant Beneficial Impacts}

The previous part of this Article explained that, despite statements to the contrary, there is no circuit split regarding whether an agency must prepare a Beneficial Impact EIS. In this section, I examine the statutory text, regulations, guidance, and policy arguments. The statutory text does not address this question and the regulations, while somewhat favoring my argument, are also not entirely clear. Policy arguments, however, strongly oppose a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement.

A. The Statutory Text

Section 102(2)(C) of NEPA, which creates the EIS requirement, provides that an agency must prepare an EIS for “major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.”\textsuperscript{117} The EIS must contain a discussion of:

(i) the environmental impact of the proposed action,
(ii) any adverse environmental effects which cannot be avoided should the proposal be implemented,
(iii) alternatives to the proposed action,
(iv) the relationship between local short-term uses of man’s environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity, and

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{See infra} Part II.B.1.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Friends of Fiery Gizzard v. Farmers Home Admin.}, 61 F.3d 501, 505 n.1 (6th Cir. 1995) (quoting \textit{River Road Alliance, Inc. v. Corps of Eng’rs}, 764 F.2d 445, 451 (7th Cir. 1985)).
(v) any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented.\footnote{Id.}

If an action is one that is otherwise subject to NEPA, the trigger for the EIS requirement is that the action will “significantly affect[] the quality of the human environment.”\footnote{Id.} The juxtaposition of the neutral “significantly affect[]” with “adverse environmental effects” could lead one to conclude that the EIS requirement is triggered by any significant environmental effect, even if that effect is significantly \textit{beneficial} for the environment.\footnote{Id.} Indeed, in a seminal law review article on NEPA, Thomas McGarity observed that “[a] literal reading of the language of NEPA requires the preparation of an EIS detailing the beneficial effects of federal actions that have no significant detrimental effects.”\footnote{Thomas O. McGarity, The Courts, the Agencies, and NEPA Threshold Issues, 55 Tex. L. Rev. 801, 850 n.194 (1977).}

Yet, the overall emphasis is still on avoiding or minimizing adverse impacts.\footnote{Id.} In section 101, Congress stated as a reason for enacting NEPA, its “recognition” of “the profound impact of man’s activity on the interrelations of all components of the natural environment, particularly the profound influences of population growth, high-density urbanization, industrial expansion, resource exploitation, and new and expanding technological advances.”\footnote{42 U.S.C. § 4331(a) (2006).} These “impact[s]” are all, or virtually all (“new and expanding technological advances” may not be) adverse.\footnote{42 U.S.C. § 4331(a) (2006). A primary goal of NEPA is thus to address these harmful impacts on the environment.

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Id.} \\
\item \footnote{Id.} \\
\item \footnote{Id.} \\
\item A precedent for interpreting seemingly neutral language to require the most detailed analysis only for adverse impacts is found in the regulations implementing the Endangered Species Act (“ESA”). Under the ESA, an action agency must consult with the FWS or National Marine Fisheries Service (“NMFS”) if the action “may affect” listed species or critical habitat. 50 C.F.R. § 402.14(a) (2010). The Departments of Commerce and the Interior have explained that the consultation requirement is triggered by “[a]ny possible effect, whether beneficial, benign, adverse, or of an undetermined character.” Interagency Cooperation—Endangered Species Act of 1973, 51 Fed Reg. 19,926, 19,949 (June 3, 1986). However, before engaging in full, formal consultation, action agencies may engage in informal consultation. “If, as a result of informal consultation, the Federal agency determines, and the Service concurs, that the action (or modified action) is ‘not likely to adversely affect’ listed species or critical habitat, then formal consultation is not required.” \textit{Id.} (emphasis added). \\
\item 42 U.S.C. § 4331(a) (2006).
\end{itemize}
The statute also indicates that its goals include “restoring and maintaining environmental quality,” working “to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony,” and “enhanc[ing] the quality of renewable resources.” These purposes seem to contemplate actions that will actively enhance environmental quality rather than merely avoid or minimize harm. Yet even these goals are not inconsistent with my argument. If one of NEPA’s goals is to promote environmentally beneficial actions, then a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement would actually hinder this goal. Such a requirement would largely serve to delay or otherwise impede environmentally beneficial projects. Therefore, even NEPA’s goal of “enhancing” environmental quality does not require a Beneficial Impact EIS.

The statutory text, therefore, does not conclusively answer the question of whether agencies must prepare a Beneficial Impact EIS, although it is consistent with my argument. I therefore next turn to the regulations and guidance promulgated by the CEQ and by other federal agencies.

B. Regulations and Guidance

1. CEQ Regulations

In 1978, the CEQ issued regulations interpreting NEPA “to guide federal agencies in determining what actions are subject to [the EIS] requirement.” The Supreme Court has held that these regulations are “entitled to substantial deference.”

In these regulations, CEQ amplifies on the statutory term “significantly.” The regulations explain that whether an action “significantly” affects the environment “requires considerations of both context and intensity.” “Context” for this purpose means that the “action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality.” “Intensity . . . refers to the severity of impact.” The regulation then lists ten considerations to be used in determining intensity.

125 Id. § 4331(a)–(b).
128 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27 (2010).
129 Id.
130 Id. § 1508.27(a).
131 Id. § 1508.27(b).
132 Id.
The first of these factors is: “Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.”\textsuperscript{133} This factor has led some to conclude that an agency must prepare a Beneficial Impact EIS. For example, the Tenth Circuit cited this sentence in its \textit{Catron County} decision.\textsuperscript{134} Even then–CEQ General Counsel Dinah Bear, in a 1989 article in the \textit{Environmental Law Reporter}, cited this provision to support her statement that “the NEPA standard of significance applies to both \textit{beneficial and adverse} impacts.”\textsuperscript{135}

Yet the better reading of the regulations is that they do not require a Beneficial Impact EIS and even implicitly disfavor it. First, they identify “intensity” as “refer[ring] to the severity of impact.”\textsuperscript{136} As the Sixth Circuit observed in \textit{Friends of Fiery Gizzard}, “[t]his choice of adjectives is significant, we think; one speaks of the severity of \textit{adverse} impacts, not \textit{beneficial} impacts.”\textsuperscript{137} Second, even the requirement to prepare an EIS for actions that have “on balance” beneficial impacts can be understood to assume that no EIS is required for actions with \textit{only} significant beneficial impacts.\textsuperscript{138} An action that on balance has beneficial impacts can have both significant adverse impacts and significant beneficial impacts. Moreover, it would not be necessary to indicate in the regulations that such actions with both significant beneficial and adverse impacts can require an EIS if actions with only significant beneficial impacts required an EIS. Yet the regulations say nothing about the latter situation.\textsuperscript{139}

More generally, the emphasis of the CEQ regulations is on avoiding or minimizing adverse impacts. Thus they instruct agencies “to the fullest extent possible” to “[u]se the NEPA process to identify and assess the reasonable alternatives to proposed actions that will \textit{avoid or minimize adverse effects} of these actions upon the quality of the human environment.”\textsuperscript{140} Agencies are also to “[u]se all practicable means . . . to . . . \textit{avoid or minimize any possible adverse effects} of their actions upon the quality of the human environment.”\textsuperscript{141}

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\item \textsuperscript{133} Id. § 1508.27(b)(1).
\item \textsuperscript{134} Catron Cnty Bd. of Comm’rs v. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Serv., 75 F.3d 1429, 1437 (10th Cir. 1996).
\item \textsuperscript{135} Bear, \textit{supra} note 5, at 10,064; \textit{see also} ECCLESTON, \textit{supra} note 6, at 159.
\item \textsuperscript{136} 40 C.F.R. § 1508.27(b) (emphasis added).
\item \textsuperscript{137} \textit{Friends of Fiery Gizzard} v. Farmers Home Admin., 61 F.3d 501, 504 (6th Cir. 1995) (emphasis in original).
\item \textsuperscript{138} \textit{See id.} at 505.
\item \textsuperscript{139} \textit{See id.} at 505–06.
\item \textsuperscript{140} 40 C.F.R. § 1500.2(e) (emphasis added).
\item \textsuperscript{141} 40 C.F.R. § 1500.2(f) (emphasis added).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
In sum, the CEQ regulations do not compel the preparation of a Beneficial Impact EIS. Yet they also do not unequivocally indicate that one is not required.

2. CEQ Guidance and the Regulations and Guidance of Other Agencies

Most federal agencies have also promulgated NEPA regulations to guide their own implementation of the statute.142 These agencies, as well as CEQ, have also issued various guidance documents addressing NEPA issues.143 Some of these documents provide strong support for the proposition that agencies should not be required to prepare Beneficial Impact EISs.144

The clearest such statement comes from the Bureau of Land Management’s NEPA Handbook.145 First, it makes it clear that an expectation that an action will have beneficial impacts does not exempt it from NEPA compliance altogether.146 Second, it provides that an EA or EIS should analyze the effects “from actions that may have both beneficial and detrimental effects, even if on balance the agency believes that the effects will be beneficial.”147 Crucially, however, “[o]nly a significant adverse effect triggers the need to prepare an EIS.”148 This series of statements exactly mirrors my proposal here. Because they are contained only in an internal handbook, however, they are not legally binding.

Similarly, the Fish and Wildlife Service’s FONSI Checklist, while not specifically addressing beneficial impacts, asks: “Does the FONSI show that the agency reasonably concluded that the project will have no significant adverse environmental consequences? Does the FONSI show that

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143 See id.
146 See id. at 13 (“As a federal agency, the BLM must meet NEPA requirements whenever it is the BLM’s decision that would result in an effect on the human environment, even when the effect would be beneficial.”).
147 Id. at 54.
148 Id. at 71 (emphasis added).
the alternatives including the proposed action will not significantly degrade some human environmental factor. Implicit in these questions is that an action with only significant beneficial impacts does not require an EIS. In addition, the concept of a mitigated FONSI, recognized by CEQ in its guidance documents and by many agencies in their specific NEPA regulations, is in tension with the idea that only significant beneficial impacts can require the preparation of an EIS. If an agency can avoid preparing an EIS by mitigating the adverse impacts of its action, it would be bizarre if an agency had no way out of preparing an EIS for a project with beneficial impacts of a similar magnitude.

All of these sources are consistent with my argument, though none of them creates a legally binding rule. I therefore turn in the next section to the policy arguments related to Beneficial Impact EISs.

### C. The Policy Aims of NEPA

NEPA declares that its purposes are:

To declare a national policy which will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment; to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere and stimulate the health and welfare of man; to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation; and to establish a Council on Environmental Quality.

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150 See id. (“An EIS is required whenever a proposed action may cause significant degradation of some human environmental factors. Does the FONSI show that the alternative including the proposed action will not significantly degrade some human environmental factor?”) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted).


152 See, e.g., 40 C.F.R. § 6.206(c)(1) (2010) (EPA regulations) (stating that “[a]ny commitments to mitigation that are essential to render the impacts of the proposed action not significant” must be included in a FONSI); 10 C.F.R. § 1021.322(b)(1) (2011) (DOE regulations) (same).

153 CEQ’s guidance on analyzing environmental justice impacts under NEPA also states that if “a proposed agency action would not cause any . . . disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental impacts, specific demographic analysis may not be warranted.” See ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, supra note 88, at 14.

The current understanding of NEPA focuses primarily on the second of these purposes. Thus, the CEQ recently declared that “NEPA was enacted to promote efforts that will prevent or eliminate damage to the human environment.”

NEPA achieves its environmental goals not through substantive mandates, however, but through procedural requirements. The EA/EIS process, which has come to be the main focus of NEPA implementation, promotes environmental protection through two mechanisms.

First, it ensures that the agency, in reaching its decision, will have available, and will carefully consider, detailed information concerning significant environmental impacts. Second, it guarantees that the relevant information will be made available to the larger audience that may also play a role in both the decisionmaking process and the implementation of that decision.

The preparation of an EIS for an action that has only significant beneficial impacts conceivably promotes the second, informational purpose of NEPA. It does little to advance the first goal, however, of injecting environmental considerations into agency decision-making. This rationale was based on the paradigm of a mission-focused agency that would not consider the environmentally detrimental consequences of its actions unless forced to weigh the environmental costs in an EIS. This paradigm seems inapplicable to an agency that is taking an action that will have predominantly beneficial effects on the environment—which is by

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157 See McGarity, supra note 121, at 850 n.194 (noting that a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement “serves the informational purpose of the Act [and] perhaps encourage[es] Congress to devote more funds to beneficial projects”).

158 FREDERICK R. ANDERSON, NEPA IN THE COURTS: A LEGAL ANALYSIS OF THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT 6 (1973) (stating that NEPA “placed an environmental imperative upon those agencies which had earlier contended that they lacked authority to consider the environmental effects of their actions”).
definition the case if it has significant beneficial impacts but no significant detrimental impacts.\(^{159}\)

Moreover, in practice, the main function of an EIS is to help the agency decide whether to cancel or modify the proposed action because of its harmful environmental impacts.\(^{160}\) If the only significant impacts that will be examined in an EIS are beneficial impacts, then those impacts will only tend to confirm the agency’s decision to continue with the action as proposed. The EIS would therefore not fulfill its main practical purpose in this situation.

Furthermore, an analysis of beneficial impacts will frequently require the agency only to examine the type of impacts that it already considers under the substantive statute pursuant to which the action is being taken. For example, under the Energy Policy and Conservation Act (“EPCA”),\(^{161}\) the Department of Energy develops energy efficiency standards for appliances.\(^{162}\) The development of new, more stringent standards arguably has a significantly beneficial environmental impact. Yet the benefit—a reduction in energy use—is precisely the consideration that the agency already is instructed to take into account under EPCA. Therefore, requiring an EIS to analyze these beneficial impacts would serve no independent purpose.

In addition, requiring an EIS for such actions can actually hinder NEPA’s underlying goal of protecting the environment.\(^{163}\) As discussed above, the preparation of an EIS is expensive and time-consuming.\(^{164}\) The additional time and money required to produce an EIS rather than an EA for an environmentally beneficial project could be better spent on preparing EISs for environmentally harmful projects or in performing other

\(^{159}\) Cf. Pub. Citizen, 541 U.S. at 767 (“[I]nherent in NEPA and its implementing regulations is a rule of reason, which ensures that agencies determine whether and to what extent to prepare an EIS based on the usefulness of any new potential information to the decision-making process. Where the preparation of an EIS would serve no purpose in light of NEPA’s regulatory scheme as a whole, no rule of reason worthy of that title would require an agency to prepare an EIS.”) (citations and internal quotation marks omitted).

\(^{160}\) See Madeline June Kass, A NEPA Climate Paradox: Taking Greenhouse Gases into Account in Threshold Significance Determinations, 42 IND. L. REV. 47, 51 (2009) (“[T]he ultimate goal of all this [EIS] process is essentially to nip in the bud the detrimental effects of human activities on the environment.”) (emphasis added).


\(^{162}\) Id. § 6295.

\(^{163}\) See McGarity, supra note 121, at 874 (stating that “when compliance with NEPA would hinder an agency in taking environmentally beneficial action . . . strict enforcement of section 102(2)(C) would defeat the environment-enhancing purpose of NEPA”).

\(^{164}\) See supra notes 12–13 and accompanying text.
agency activities. More specifically, recognizing a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement could delay or weaken environmentally beneficial actions.\textsuperscript{165} Opponents of environmental protection have already attempted to use NEPA for this purpose.\textsuperscript{166}

In other contexts, the courts have resisted efforts by regulated entities or anti-environmental interests to misuse NEPA in this fashion.\textsuperscript{167} For example, when the D.C. Circuit created the “functional equivalence” doctrine, under which EPA actions developed through a process that provided “the functional equivalent of [an] impact statement” were exempt from NEPA, it remarked that “opponents of environmental protection would use the issue of [NEPA] compliance . . . as a tactic of litigation and delay.”\textsuperscript{168} Similarly, in refusing to require an EIS for species listings under the ESA, the Sixth Circuit stated that “[t]his Court is reluctant to make NEPA more of an obstructionist tactic to prevent environment-enhancing action than it may already have become.”\textsuperscript{169} Here too, courts should not allow opponents of environmental protection to hinder environmentally beneficial actions by requiring a Beneficial Impact EIS.

Moreover, a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement would create perverse incentives for agencies. Under such a requirement, an agency would need to prepare an EIS for an action with significant environmental benefits, but not for an action with insignificant environmental benefits.\textsuperscript{170} To avoid having to prepare this type of EIS, agencies would have an

\textsuperscript{165} Katie Kendall, Note, \textit{The Long and Winding “Road”: How NEPA Noncompliance for Preservation Actions Protects the Environment}, 69 \textit{BROOK. L. REV.} 663, 683 (2004) ("[T]he time it may take to file an EIS [for an environmentally beneficial action] and later defend its soundness in court subverts environmental preservation."); \textit{see id.} at 684 (arguing that the preparation of an EIS for the Roadless Rule meant that "valuable time [was] lost in the fight for environmental conservation").

\textsuperscript{166} \textit{See McGarity, supra} note 121, at 850 n.194 (explaining that "polluters have embraced this view of NEPA as a shield to parry efforts to implement environmentally protective federal action"); \textit{id.} at 874 n.313 ("[S]ince the overall goal of NEPA . . . is to protect the environment, the courts have wisely refrained from allowing plaintiffs with monetary goals to defeat the overall purpose.").

\textsuperscript{167} \textit{See John E. Bonine & Thomas O. McGarity, The Law of Environmental Protection: Cases, Legislation, Policy} 63 (2d ed. 1992) ("Occasionally a polluter will invoke NEPA in an attempt to forestall environmentally beneficial action. . . . The courts have uniformly rejected these efforts.").


\textsuperscript{169} Pac. Legal Found. v. Andrus, 657 F.2d 829, 838 (6th Cir. 1981); \textit{accord} Douglas Cnty. v. Babbitt, 48 F.3d 1495, 1508 (9th Cir. 1995).

\textsuperscript{170} \textit{See Friends of Fiery Gizzard v. Farmers Home Admin.}, 61 F.3d 501, 505 (6th Cir. 1995).
incentive to choose an alternative with smaller environmental benefits and thereby avoid the delay and expense of preparing an EIS. Alternatively, an agency might ignore the environmental benefits of a project altogether so as to avoid triggering a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement. These results would be inconsistent with NEPA’s goal of enhancing environmental quality.

III. COUNTERARGUMENTS, PART ONE: NO HARM, NO FOUL

There are several possible criticisms of my proposal. I respond to them in the next two parts. First, I address here various arguments that suggest there is no need to worry about a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement because other doctrines will ensure that such a requirement is not abused to hinder environmental protection.

A. Standing Will Take Care of It

First, one might argue that any fear that polluters or industry will use a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement to hinder environmentally beneficial actions is overblown because such interests will not have prudential standing to bring suit under NEPA. While prudential standing will impede at least some cases attempting to enforce a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement, it will not eliminate all of them. In addition, this argument ignores that agencies will usually prepare such an EIS if legally required to do so, regardless of the availability of standing to potential challengers.

171 For example, the EAs of many wind power projects have ignored or given short shrift to their greenhouse gas emission reduction benefits. See Bisbee, supra note 20, at 374–79.

172 Joel Gallob has criticized the NEPA process as being too focused on the dichotomy between environmental harms and economic benefits. Gallob, supra note 155, at 414–15. He observes that “[w]hereas environmental groups and the EPA have traditionally defended against potential harms, no group has displayed an institutional interest in uncovering potential benefits.” Id. at 442. Unlike when Gallob wrote, in 1990, it is no longer the case that environmental groups do not advocate for recognition of the environmental benefits of some projects, like renewable energy generation. It is worth noting, however, that a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement would reduce the incentive of such groups to advocate for recognition of environmental benefits, lest such recognition delay the project while an EIS is prepared.

173 See Jonathan M. Cosco, Note, NEPA for the Gander: NEPA’s Application to Critical Habitat Designations and Other “Benevolent” Federal Action, 8 DUKE ENVTL. L. & POL’Y F. 345, 384 (1998) (“[S]tanding requirements will help ensure that NEPA is not abused by industry proponents.”).

174 See id. at 355 n.50.
Standing has both constitutional and prudential components. Constitutional standing is a limit on the subject-matter jurisdiction of a federal court and is assessed using the familiar three-part test of injury-in-fact, causation, and redressability.\(^{175}\) Prudential standing, by contrast, is a set of “several judicially self-imposed limits on the exercise of federal jurisdiction.”\(^{176}\) Among these limits is the “zone of interests” test, which determines “whether a particular plaintiff has been granted a right to sue by the statute under which he or she brings suit.”\(^{177}\)

Because “[t]he purpose of NEPA is to protect the environment,” courts have generally held that “a plaintiff who asserts purely economic injuries does not have standing to challenge an agency action under NEPA.”\(^{178}\) Similarly, the D.C. Circuit has held that a plaintiff asserting an interest in traffic safety does not have prudential standing under NEPA.\(^{179}\)

Accordingly, the argument would go, any polluter who attempts to use NEPA to hinder an environmentally beneficial action in defense of purely economic interests will lack standing to bring such a claim. As a result, courts will not need to reach the issue of whether a Beneficial Impact EIS is required in such cases.

While it is undoubtedly true that prudential standing will reduce the number of claims brought to require a Beneficial Impact EIS, it will not eliminate them entirely. First, even individuals and groups with predominantly economic interests will, in some cases, be able to identify environmental interests sufficient to satisfy the zone of interests test.\(^{180}\) As the D.C. Circuit has explained, even a plaintiff motivated primarily by

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\(^{177}\) City of Sausalito v. O’Neill, 386 F.3d 1186, 1199 (9th Cir. 2004).

\(^{178}\) Nevada Land Action Ass’n v. U.S. Forest Serv., 8 F.3d 713, 716 (9th Cir. 1993); accord Nat’l Ass’n of Home Builders v. U.S. Army Corps of Engrs, 417 F.3d 1272, 1287 (D.C. Cir. 2005) (“[A]n allegation of injury to monetary interest alone may not, of course, bring a party within the zone of environmental interests as contemplated by NEPA for purposes of standing.”) (alteration in original) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted); Taubman Realty Grp. Ltd. P’ship v. Mineta, 320 F.3d 475, 481 (4th Cir. 2003); Churchill Truck Lines, Inc. v. United States, 533 F.2d 411, 416 (8th Cir. 1976).

\(^{179}\) Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Nat’l Highway Traffic Safety Admin., 901 F.2d 107, 124 (D.C. Cir. 2000); see also Ranchers Cattlemen Action Legal Fund United Stockgrowers of Am. v. U.S. Dept. of Agric., 415 F.3d 1078, 1103 (9th Cir. 2005) (denying prudential standing to a plaintiff claiming that its members will “be adversely affected by the increased risk of disease they face when Canadian beef enters the U.S. meat supply” because the plaintiff “has failed to show any relationship between risks to human health and environmental harms”).

\(^{180}\) See MANDELKER, supra note 7, at § 4.23 (“Despite clear rulings that economic injury does not qualify plaintiffs for standing, creative litigants have attempted to avoid this barrier by alleging environmental as well as economic injury.”).
economic concerns may still have other interests sufficient to establish prudential standing: “[A] plaintiff’s economic interests do not blight his qualifying ones, such as aesthetic and environmental interests in the quality of public lands where he hikes, camps, fishes, etc. Under our circuit’s law NEPA standing is not limited to the ‘pure of heart.’”

For example, in *Mountain States Legal Foundation v. Glicksman*, two property rights organizations, Montana and Idaho municipalities, and a timber company challenged a proposal for timber harvesting in the Kootenai National Forest, arguing that the Forest Service should have allowed more trees to be cut. The plaintiffs brought suit under several statutes, including NEPA. As for the NEPA claim, the D.C. Circuit held that the plaintiffs had satisfied the zone of interests test because some of their members hiked in the Forest, which they alleged was subject to an increased risk of wildfires. Other courts have reached similar conclusions.

Second, a number of cases brought to date arguing in favor of a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement have been filed by animal welfare organizations. Thus, for example, the Ninth Circuit decision mentioned at the beginning of this article, *Humane Society v. Locke*, was brought by

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182 Id. at 1231.
183 Id. at 1236. To the extent that such a suit is brought by an organization rather than individual plaintiffs, organizational standing presents an additional burden for industry interests suing under NEPA. If such a group asserts that injury to a member’s aesthetic or recreational interests establishes prudential standing, a court will usually hold that that member’s interests are not germane to the organization’s purposes, and hence that the organization does not have standing to represent those interests. See, e.g., Cent. S.D. Co-op Grazing Dist. v. Sec’y of the U.S. Dep’t of Agric., 266 F.3d 889, 897 (8th Cir. 2001) (holding that the protection of wildlife habitat was not germane to the purpose of a grazing district). Similarly, when a business entity brings suit, it cannot base its prudential standing on the aesthetic or recreational interests of its employees. Rock Creek Pack Station, Inc. v. Blackwell, 344 F. Supp. 2d 192, 205 (D.D.C. 2004).
184 See, e.g., *Ranchers Cattlemen Action Legal Fund*, 415 F.3d at 1103 (“A plaintiff can, however, have standing under NEPA even if his or her interest is primarily economic, as long as he or she also alleges an environmental interest or economic injuries that are causally related to an act within NEPA’s embrace.”) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted); Robinson v. Knebel, 550 F.2d 422, 425 (8th Cir. 1977) (holding that landowners adjacent to proposed development had standing because they alleged not only economic harm but also a loss of hunting opportunities); California Forestry Ass’n v. Bosworth, No. 2:05-cv-00905-MCE-GGH, 2008 WL 4370074, at *12 (E.D. Cal. Sept. 24, 2008) (holding that timber industry groups had standing to challenge the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment under NEPA because “their interests in increased fuels treatment were ‘causally related’ to environmental concerns like stand-replacing wildfires which clearly fall within NEPA’s rubric”).
185 626 F.3d 1040 (9th Cir. 2010).
the Humane Society of the United States, amongst other plaintiffs. In this case, the plaintiffs challenged a decision by the National Marine Fisheries Service (“NMFS”) to authorize the annual killing of eighty-five sea lions that were preying on threatened and endangered salmon and steelhead at the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River.\(^\text{186}\) The plaintiffs argued that NMFS’s characterization of the benefits of killing the sea lions for listed salmon and steelhead as “significant” required the preparation of an EIS.\(^\text{187}\)

Similarly, in *Fund for Animals v. Norton*,\(^\text{188}\) the lead plaintiff was an animal welfare organization. It challenged the issuance of a depredation permit by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to the State of Maryland that would allow the state to kill 525 mute swans, an invasive species that was damaging underwater plant communities in Chesapeake Bay and other watersheds along the eastern seaboard.\(^\text{189}\) Again, the plaintiffs argued, in part, that an EIS was required because “defendants themselves have stated that the proposed permit will have significant beneficial impacts on the environment.”\(^\text{190}\)

In these cases, the plaintiffs’ prudential standing under NEPA was apparently uncontested. Their standing would not have been controversial, given the many other cases brought by animal welfare or animal rights groups in which the plaintiffs have been found to have standing to sue under NEPA.\(^\text{191}\) Such groups typically base standing on their members’ aesthetic injury resulting from the deaths of animals that the individual enjoys observing in the wild, which is clearly a cognizable injury for purposes of constitutional standing.\(^\text{192}\) Courts have also found such interests to be germane to the purposes of animal welfare groups.\(^\text{193}\)

Animal welfare groups can therefore establish prudential standing based on their members’ interests in observing even animals that produce detrimental environmental impacts, as allegedly was the case with the sea lions in *Humane Society v. Locke* and the mute swans in

\(^{186}\) *Id.* at 1044.

\(^{187}\) *Id.* at 1055–56.


\(^{189}\) *Id.* at 213–15.

\(^{190}\) *Id.* at 232.


\(^{192}\) Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife, 504 U.S. 555, 562–63 (1992) (“Of course, the desire to use or observe an animal species, even for purely esthetic purposes, is undeniably a cognizable interest for purpose of standing.”).

\(^{193}\) *See, e.g.*, Humane Soc’y v. Hodel, 840 F.2d at 59–60.
**Fund for Animals v. Norton.** As a result, such groups will be able to use NEPA to hinder environmentally beneficial actions through the enforcement of a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement.

In sum, prudential standing doctrine will not eliminate litigation to enforce a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement. Industry groups will, in some cases, be able to establish standing based on subsidiary environmental interests. In other cases, animal welfare groups will be able to establish standing to challenge environmentally beneficial actions that harm individual animals.

Moreover, leaving litigation to one side, this argument also ignores the *ex ante* incentives created for federal agencies. Even if it is unlikely that there will be a plaintiff with prudential standing who would challenge an agency’s failure to prepare a Beneficial Impact EIS for an environmentally beneficial action, agencies will usually prepare a Beneficial Impact EIS if the courts clearly require them. As a result, agencies will still need to devote excessive resources to such EISs.

**B. Courts Will Not Enjoin Environmentally Beneficial Projects When Remanding for Preparation of a Beneficial Impact EIS**

Another possible response to my proposal is to point to case law suggesting that some courts will not enjoin an agency action even when requiring a Beneficial Impact EIS. In particular, some cases hold that a court should not impose an injunction “under NEPA when enjoining government action would result in more harm to the environment than denying injunctive relief.”

For example, in *American Motorcyclist Ass’n v. Watt*, the plaintiffs challenged a land management plan for federal land in the California

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194 If the impact of certain animals, such as invasive species, on the environment truly is negative, it is not clear that an interest in observing such animals should count as being within the zone of interests protected by NEPA.


198 714 F.2d 962 (9th Cir. 1983).
They alleged that the development of the plan violated the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 ("FLPMA") as well as NEPA. The district court denied the plaintiffs’ motion for a preliminary injunction. On appeal the Ninth Circuit affirmed the district court decision, holding that the issuance of an injunction would not be in the public interest because “it is clear in this case that strong environmental considerations militated against enjoining the Plan. The district court found there was a danger of harm to the fragile desert resources of the [California Desert Conservation Area] if the Plan’s restrictions were lifted and plaintiffs were allowed to pursue increased motor vehicle use.”

In any case in which the proposed action will have significant environmentally beneficial impacts but no significant detrimental impacts, the effect of enjoining the action will be a net harm to the environment. Therefore, under this rule, such projects will not be delayed even if a court requires that the agency perform a Beneficial Impact EIS. One might therefore argue that the agency will suffer no harm and that, given the informational benefits of requiring an EIS, the benefits of such a requirement outweigh the costs.

There are several responses to this argument. First, it ignores the cost, both in time and resources, that an agency must devote to an EIS. Even if a court adopting a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement does not impose an injunction, it will still require the agency to complete the EIS on remand. The completion of this EIS will tie up money and personnel better devoted to other work.

Second, the argument ignores the ex ante effects on agency behavior. If an agency knows that a court will require the preparation of a Beneficial Impact EIS, then the agency will likely prepare one, even if the agency also knows that the court will not enjoin the underlying action in the absence of such an EIS. As a result, environmentally beneficial agency actions will still be delayed because of the additional time required to complete an EIS.

Third, the American Motorcyclist Association rule does not appear to have been adopted outside the Ninth Circuit. A traditional balancing of

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199 Id. at 964.
200 Id.
201 Id. at 966; see Kootenai Tribe v. Veneman, 313 F.3d 1094, 1124–26 (9th Cir. 2002) overruled by Wilderness Soc’y v. U.S. Forest Serv., 630 F.3d 1173 (9th Cir. 2011) (holding that the district court improperly failed to consider the conservation benefits of the Roadless Rule in deciding to impose an injunction under NEPA); Alpine Lakes Prot. Soc’y v. Schlapfer, 518 F.2d 1089, 1090 (9th Cir. 1975) (denying a NEPA injunction in a case involving the harvesting of insect-infested timber because of the danger of the infestation spreading to other trees if the harvesting was enjoined).
the harms, however, should usually weigh against granting an injunction when the environmental harm will be greater if the injunction is granted than if it is denied. Nevertheless, the limited applicability of this rule also suggests that its existence does not undermine my argument against requiring Beneficial Impact EISs.

C. The Statutory and Common-Law Exemptions from NEPA Will Take Care of It

Another response would be to argue that most, if not all, actions that will have only significant environmentally beneficial effects are already exempted from the EIS process. These exemptions take two forms. Some are statutory, such as the exemptions for all of EPA’s actions under the Clean Air Act (“CAA”)202 and most of them under the Clean Water Act (“CWA”).203 Others have been created by the courts. The main such exemption is the functional equivalence rule, which applies to actions that are “subject to rules and regulations that essentially duplicate the NEPA inquiry.”204 Some environmentally beneficial actions, such as the listing of species under the Endangered Species Act,205 Superfund cleanup actions,206 and cancellations of pesticide registrations207 have been exempted from NEPA under the functional equivalence exemption.208

While these exemptions do account for a large number of actions that would otherwise be subject to a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement, they by no means cover all of them. One need only look at the cases

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202 Clean Air Act, 15 U.S.C. § 793(c)(1) (2006) (“No action taken under the Clean Air Act shall be deemed a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act.”) (internal citation omitted).


204 Catron Cnty Bd. of Comm’rs v. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Serv., 75 F.3d 1429, 1435 (10th Cir. 1996).


206 Schalk v. Reilly, 900 F.2d 1091, 1098 (7th Cir. 1990).


208 Another judicially created exemption, which is rarely invoked, exempts an agency from preparing an EIS when there is “a clear and unavoidable conflict in statutory authority,” such as when an action must be completed too quickly for an EIS to be possible. Flint Ridge Dev. Co. v. Scenic Rivers Ass’n, 426 U.S. 776, 788 (1976).
discussed above to see that the issue still arises despite these exemptions. More generally, my proposal allows a specific action to avoid the EIS process even though the broader category of actions to which it belongs may in some cases require an EIS.

IV. COUNTERARGUMENTS, PART TWO: WE NEED A BENEFICIAL IMPACT EIS REQUIREMENT

Another set of counterarguments take on my proposal more directly, arguing that for various reasons a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement is desirable. I rebut several such arguments in this part.

A. You Can’t Know Whether the Impacts Are Beneficial or Adverse Until You Complete an EIS

One argument is that it is impossible to know whether the environmental impacts of an action are actually beneficial or adverse without going through the process of completing an EIS. As one commentator who favors NEPA compliance for environmentally “benevolent” actions has put it, “[t]he problem with creating a broad exemption for benevolent federal action is that there is no way to determine, absent a thorough examination of a proposed action’s environmental impacts, to what extent that action would in fact conserve the environment, and to what extent it might harm the environment.”

This argument would be more appropriate if I were suggesting that certain actions be exempted from NEPA altogether. That is not my proposal, however. I argue only that an action that will have significant beneficial impacts but no significant detrimental impacts, as determined through an EA or the categorical exclusion process, does not require the preparation of a full EIS. My proposal, therefore, requires some analysis of the environmental impacts of a proposed action or category of actions. If an EA produces no evidence of significant detrimental impacts, the agency should not be required to go to the time and expense of preparing an EIS just because one can always learn more with additional analysis.

209 Cosco, supra note 173, at 380; see Eccleston, supra note 6, at 159 (“[I]t may be difficult if not impossible, to demonstrate that an action would actually result in a significant beneficial impact (with no significant adverse side effects) without first preparing an analysis to review thoroughly the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts. An action that is substantial enough to significantly improve the environment might also involve hidden or unknown adverse impacts that can be adequately identified only through preparation of a detailed analysis.”).
A related observation is that whether an action’s impact is beneficial or adverse depends on the baseline that you adopt. A representative case is *Center for Biological Diversity v. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.* In this case, the petitioner challenged the EA for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration’s (“NHTSA”) corporate average fuel economy (“CAFÉ”) standards for light trucks. The court found that NHTSA’s analysis of the action’s cumulative impact on climate change was inadequate. The proposed fuel economy standards would be more stringent than the existing standards but, because the number of vehicle miles driven was projected to increase, the total greenhouse gas emissions from light trucks in the United States would increase under the proposal.

The agency saw the appropriate baseline as continued regulation under the prior CAFÉ standard; from this perspective, the agency’s action had a beneficial environmental impact. The Ninth Circuit disagreed, but its reasons for doing so were not entirely clear. At some points in the opinion, the court appeared to rely on the absolute increase in greenhouse gas emissions in concluding that the action would have a significant environmental impact. At others, however, the court suggested that an action could be significant even if it had a small, beneficial impact, so long as there were alternatives available to the agency that would have had a greater environmental benefit.

This case shows that whether an action’s impacts count as beneficial or adverse can depend on the baseline that one uses for comparison. Note that in *Center for Biological Diversity,* however, the court did not rely on the existence of asserted beneficial impacts to conclude that an EIS was required; the court was explicit that it rejected the agency’s explanation for its FONSI because “[p]etitioners have raised a substantial question as to whether the CAFÉ standards for light trucks [model years] 2008–2011 may cause significant degradation of some human environmental

10 538 F.3d 1172 (9th Cir. 2008).
11 Id. at 1181.
12 Id. at 1216.
13 Id. at 1184, 1216.
14 See id. at 1216 (“NHTSA does not dispute that the CAFÉ standard will have an effect on global warming due to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions. The new rule will not actually result in a decrease in carbon emissions, but potentially only a decrease in the rate of growth of carbon emissions.”).
15 See id. at 1223 (“In light of the evidence in the record, it is hardly ‘self-evident’ that a 0.2 percent decrease in carbon emissions (as opposed to a greater decrease) is not significant.”); see also Kass, *supra* note 160, at 69 (observing that in *Center for Biological Diversity,* “[e]ven the fact that the NHTSA projected the rulemaking action would decrease carbon dioxide emission rates—as compared to the existing rule—did not alter the court’s conclusion”).
The court’s characterization in this case is the correct one: a federal authorization to perform an environmentally harmful action should count as an adverse environmental impact, even if the current action authorizes less of the harmful activity than in the past.

B. You Can’t Trust the Agency’s Characterization of the Effects as Beneficial

One might also argue that agencies may mis-characterize the nature of, or overemphasize certain aspects of, the effects of their actions. One of the primary goals of NEPA, after all, was to overcome agency “tunnel vision” and require agencies to consider other perspectives on their proposed actions. Agencies might “disingenuously characterize their actions as ‘benevolent’ in order to avoid the administrative burdens of complying with NEPA.” Or, to take a more charitable view, they might simply overlook that an action that will primarily have beneficial environmental impacts, such as reducing air pollution, also has collateral adverse impacts, such as water or solid waste pollution, or harms to migratory birds. Similarly, a timber harvesting project intended to reduce wildfire risk or disease transmission might also increase soil erosion or damage the habitat of endangered species. In all of these cases, the NEPA process can help ensure that the agency considers the full range of environmental impacts associated with an action.

216 Center for Biological Diversity, 538 F.3d at 1221 (second emphasis added) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted).


218 Cosco, supra note 173, at 380; see Scientists’ Inst. for Pub. Info., Inc. v. Atomic Energy Comm’n, 481 F.2d 1079, 1089 n.43 (D.C. Cir. 1973) (observing that “an agency like [the Atomic Energy Commission], which has a statutory mandate to develop nuclear technologies, may minimize the possible adverse effects of its technology development programs”) (internal citation omitted).

219 See Portland Cement Ass’n, 486 F.2d at 384 (“Concern was also voiced by petitioners in this case that EPA might wear blinders when promulgating standards protecting one resource as to effects on other resources, as is asserted in this case, that air standards may increase water pollution.”); Cosco, supra note 173, at 381–82 (“[A]ctions intended to benefit the environment may have undesirable secondary effects—effects that might go unnoticed without the benefit of NEPA compliance.”); Anderson, supra note 67, at 263 (“That the ‘major actions’ taken by EPA are in large measure environmentally protective ones is not a sufficiently distinguishing factor. Specialization and ‘tunnel vision’ within the environmental field may be as harmful as they are in other areas.”).

This argument is also better directed at proposals to exempt some agency actions completely from NEPA. When an agency prepares an EA, a court will have a document before it from which the court can determine whether the agency adequately explained its characterization of the effects associated with the proposed action. Courts already remand EAs when they find that an agency has mis-characterized the effects of an action as beneficial. For example, in *National Resources Defense Council v. Hodel*, the court rejected the defendants’ characterization of “the potential environmental benefits” of Cooperative Management Agreements with ranchers on Bureau of Land Management land because “[t]he EA is devoid, however, of any mention of or justification for defendants’ relinquishment of their authority to cancel, suspend, or modify permits when overgrazing occurs.” It is not clear that a Beneficial Impact EIS requirement would do anything to enhance this form of judicial review.

**CONCLUSION**

A Beneficial Impact EIS requirement is not required under NEPA, CEQ’s implementing regulations, or judicial precedent. Such a requirement would produce environmentally pernicious effects and so is contrary to the purpose and goals of the statute. Courts that are faced with these questions should therefore make it clear that agencies need not prepare an EIS for an action with only significant environmentally beneficial impacts. In addition, the CEQ should issue guidance to clarify that agencies need not prepare an EIS under these circumstances.

Finally, environmental organizations should be wary of raising this argument in litigation. In some cases, environmental groups have sued over actions that they perceive to be environmentally harmful but, when rebuffed by the courts in their efforts to compel preparation of an EIS because of these adverse impacts, have made the fallback argument that significant beneficial effects alone are enough. While this argument, if successful, might bring them success in an individual case, it would in the long run do more harm than good to their goal of environmental protection.

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222 *Id.* at 872; see *Sierra Club v. Froehlke*, 359 F. Supp. 1289, 1368–69 (S.D. Tex. 1973) (rejecting the Army Corps of Engineers’ conclusion that the “environmental benefits” of a damming project included benefits to hunting, fishing, and “nature students”), rev’d on other grounds by *Sierra Club v. Callaway*, 499 F.2d 982 (5th Cir. 1974); see also *supra* notes 91–96 and accompanying text (discussing *Environmental Protection Information Center v. Blackwell*, 389 F. Supp. 2d 1174 (N.D. Cal. 2004)).
223 See *supra* notes 23–40 and accompanying text.
EXPORTING WASTE: REGULATION OF THE EXPORT OF HAZARDOUS WASTES FROM THE UNITED STATES

JEFFREY M. GABA*

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The international trade in hazardous wastes has been a subject of controversy for decades. Notorious examples of hazardous wastes being improperly disposed of in Africa have created concern about the legitimacy of developed western countries “dumping” the hazardous byproducts of their industrial development on less-developed countries. Alarms have

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1 In 2006, there was an international furor when the vessel Probo Koala unloaded toxic wastes in the port city of Abidjan, Ivory Coast. Seven people died as a result of improper disposal of the wastes, and the scandal led the president of the Ivory Coast to dismiss his cabinet. See Tanya Karina A. Lat, Note, Testing the Limits of GATT Art. XX(b): Toxic Waste...
been sounded about the adverse impacts on human health and the environment from the practice of exporting electronic wastes for recycling.2

Most members of the international community, with the notable exception of the United States, have addressed these concerns through the Basel Convention on the Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes.3 The Basel Convention establishes a “notice and consent” regime that allows the trade in hazardous waste, both for disposal and recycling, only if the government of the importing country has been given advanced notice of and consents to the shipment.4 This notice and consent regime attempts to address concerns about the human health and environmental risks of the trade in hazardous waste while at the same time both fostering the alleged economic efficiencies that result from free trade in hazardous wastes.5

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4 See Basel, supra note 3, at arts. 6, 9.

and respecting the rights of states to establish their own environmental policy.\(^6\)

Although an international scofflaw with respect to the Basel Convention, the United States does regulate the export of hazardous waste. The Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) has issued a complex set of regulations that establish domestic “notice and consent” requirements on the export of hazardous wastes.\(^7\) These regulations implement section 3017 of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (“RCRA”) which prohibits the export of hazardous waste unless the exporter complies with either a set of Congressionally defined “notice and consent” requirements or, if in existence, any international agreements between the United States and the receiving country.\(^8\) The United States is a party to three such international agreements: bilateral agreements with Canada and Mexico and a Decision of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (“OECD”) governing the transboundary movement of hazardous wastes.\(^9\)

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\(^{6}\) See Basel, supra note 3, at Preamble. The Preamble to the Basel Convention recognizes “the sovereign right [of States] to ban the entry or disposal of foreign hazardous wastes.” Id. The tension in international agreements between establishing environmental standards and concerns, particularly among developing countries, about preserving state sovereignty to establish environmental policy is a staple of debate in international environmental law. See, e.g., A. Dan Tarlock, Exclusive Sovereignty Versus Sustainable Development of a Shared Resource: The Dilemma of Latin American Rainforest Management, 32 TEX. INT’L L.J. 37 (1997).


\(^{8}\) Id.

The purpose of this Article is to examine the legal bases for EPA’s regulation of the export of hazardous waste and the manner in which EPA’s regulations operate. The article contains a detailed examination of EPA’s complex sets of export regulations and provides data on the actual scope of exports reported to EPA. It then examines a series of questions regarding EPA’s authority to regulate the export of hazardous wastes: What domestic authority does EPA derive from the international agreements? What is the scope of EPA’s authority to exclude hazardous wastes from export control? What authority does EPA have to ban the export of hazardous wastes to countries with which the United States does not have an international agreement and which may not manage the waste properly? This Article also examines the extent to which EPA regulations address the significant concerns associated with the largely unregulated export of electronic wastes.

This Article reaches a number of perhaps surprising conclusions. First, there are significant and unaddressed constitutional and statutory questions regarding EPA’s authority to regulate the export of hazardous wastes under RCRA. Among other things, the Article evaluates the implications of the provisions of section 3017 that purport to give domestic legal effect to future international agreements. A particular problem arises with conferring domestic legal effect on the Decision of the OECD (“the OECD Decision”), and recent case law suggests that giving such domestic effect to the OECD Decision would be an unconstitutional delegation of legislative authority to an international body. If the OECD Decision does not have binding domestic effect, then EPA’s regulations governing exports within the OECD for recycling may, among other things, have been promulgated in violation of the notice and comment requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act.

Second, although the United States has not ratified the Basel Convention, the Senate did consent to ratification in 1992 and the only step necessary to complete ratification may be submission of U.S. government compliance reports. This Article does not address issues relating to the importation of hazardous waste into the United States. Although there are potential concerns regarding the import of wastes, in most cases those wastes, once they enter the United States, are subject to the same requirements applicable to domestic hazardous waste. See 40 C.F.R. § 262.60 (2010); see Statement of Robert Heiss, Joint U.S.-Canada Industry Workshop, supra note 9 (New Developments in Statutory and Regulatory Framework: U.S. Side).
The obstacle to ratification has been the widespread perception that statutory changes to RCRA would be necessary to implement Basel. This Article suggests that RCRA currently contains adequate authority to implement Basel and thus ratification could be immediately undertaken. The Article argues, however, that control of the international trade in U.S. hazardous waste may be better served by the United States not ratifying Basel.

Third, there may be a substantial misperception, fostered by EPA, about the regulation of electronic wastes under RCRA. EPA has suggested that only waste “cathode ray tubes” are a hazardous waste under RCRA, but EPA’s own data suggests that a substantial amount of other e-wastes should be classified as hazardous wastes and thus subject to export controls. Perhaps the most significant step EPA could take to strengthen its existing export regulations would be to clarify the status of such e-wastes.

Fourth, EPA does have the authority under RCRA to impose export controls on hazardous wastes that it has excluded from domestic regulation. Thus, EPA could regulate the export of e-wastes while not imposing requirements on the domestic recycling of such wastes.

Finally, EPA’s management of the export of hazardous waste would be improved by providing more transparency through online posting of export data. Concerns about releasing confidential business information do not stand as a significant obstacle to providing this information.

I. REGULATION OF HAZARDOUS WASTES WITHIN THE UNITED STATES

Subtitle C of RCRA establishes the basic “cradle to grave” system that governs regulation of the domestic disposal, treatment, and storage of “hazardous waste.” Since it is difficult to evaluate EPA’s regulation of the export of hazardous waste without understanding the domestic requirements to which they would otherwise be subject, a brief excursus on RCRA (which RCRA mavens may ignore) is warranted.

RCRA does not regulate the broad mass of materials that might be considered hazardous wastes. Rather, Subtitle C of RCRA imposes
regulatory requirements only on those materials that meet both EPA's regulatory definition of “solid waste” and “hazardous waste.”\textsuperscript{14} EPA's regulatory definition of “solid waste” is notorious for its complexity.\textsuperscript{15} At its simplest, the definition of solid waste includes materials that are obviously discarded by being abandoned.\textsuperscript{16} Materials sent to a landfill for disposal would be considered solid wastes under RCRA. EPA, however, also defines some, but not all, materials that are recycled as solid wastes.\textsuperscript{17} Whether a recycled material is regulated as a solid waste depends both on the type of material and the manner by which it is recycled. “Spent materials,” “byproducts,” and some “commercial chemical products” that are sent to be recycled by “reclamation” or by being used as a “fuel” are also solid wastes.\textsuperscript{18} Under EPA's definition, spent lead-acid batteries or cathode ray tubes that are recycled by having their lead content recovered would be solid wastes.

Solid wastes must also be “hazardous” to be regulated under Subtitle C.\textsuperscript{19} A solid waste may be classified as hazardous in either of two ways. First, a solid waste may be a “listed” waste; any solid waste on specific hazard lists promulgated by EPA is classified as a hazardous waste.\textsuperscript{20} Second, an unlisted waste can still be hazardous if it exhibits one of four hazard “characteristics.”\textsuperscript{21} These characteristics include “ignitability” (capacity to catch fire), “reactivity” (capacity to explode), “corrosivity” (low and high pH materials), and “toxicity.”\textsuperscript{22} The toxicity characteristic involves testing an extract of the material to see if it contains concentrations of forty specific chemicals above a regulatory threshold.\textsuperscript{23} Thus, if an extract of a waste contained more than five milligrams per liter of lead it would exhibit the toxicity characteristic.\textsuperscript{24} While EPA is responsible for

\textsuperscript{15} See 40 C.F.R. § 261.2. See generally Jeffrey M. Gaba, Rethinking Recycling, 38 ENVTL. L. 1053 (2008).
\textsuperscript{16} 40 C.F.R. § 261.2(b).
\textsuperscript{17} 40 C.F.R. § 261.2(a)(2)(i)(B).
\textsuperscript{18} 40 C.F.R. § 261.2(c) tbl.1.
\textsuperscript{19} 40 C.F.R. § 261.3.
\textsuperscript{20} See 40 C.F.R. §§ 261.31–.33.
\textsuperscript{21} 40 C.F.R. §§ 261.20–.24.
\textsuperscript{22} Id.
\textsuperscript{23} 40 C.F.R. § 261.24.
\textsuperscript{24} 40 C.F.R. § 261.24 tbl.1.
making the determination to “list” a hazardous waste,\(^\text{25}\) the determination of whether a solid waste exhibits a hazard characteristic must be made on a case-by-case basis by the generator.\(^\text{26}\)

The class of Subtitle C hazardous wastes is far from comprehensive; solid wastes may be hazardous, but if they are neither listed nor exhibit a hazard characteristic they are simply not RCRA hazardous wastes.\(^\text{27}\)

Additionally, EPA has promulgated a large number of exemptions and exclusions that exempt materials from being classified as either solid or hazardous wastes.\(^\text{28}\) EPA has, for example, excluded “household hazardous waste” from classification as a Subtitle C waste and therefore most municipal solid waste is not regulated as hazardous waste.\(^\text{29}\) EPA does, however, employ a device, known as a “conditional exclusion,” through which it imposes regulatory requirements as a condition for excluding the material from being classified as a solid or hazardous waste.\(^\text{30}\)

The Subtitle C program imposes certain requirements on the management of hazardous wastes. These include 1) an obligation on generators to determine if their material is a regulated hazardous waste, 2) a requirement that a tracking document, known as a hazardous waste manifest, accompany the transportation of hazardous waste, 3) certain limited requirements on transporters of hazardous waste, and 4) a limitation, in most cases, on the disposal or treatment of hazardous wastes at facilities that have received a federal hazardous waste permit.\(^\text{31}\) EPA generally does not regulate the recycling process or products produced from the recycling

\(^{25}\) 40 C.F.R. § 261.30.

\(^{26}\) 40 C.F.R. § 262.11.

\(^{27}\) For example, unlisted wastes that contain high concentrations of dioxin might not be classified as a hazardous waste since dioxin is not one of the chemicals tested under the “toxicity characteristic.” See 40 C.F.R. § 261.24 tbl.1.

\(^{28}\) These exemptions and exclusions litter various parts of EPA’s RCRA regulations, but 40 C.F.R. § 261.4 (labeled Exclusions) contains the most specific list of exempt materials. 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a) contains exclusions from classification as a “solid waste.” Id. 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(b) contains exclusions from classification as a “hazardous waste.” Id. The distinction is in most respects moot; either exclusion exempts the material from being classified as a Subtitle C hazardous waste.

\(^{29}\) 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(b)(1). Ash from the incineration of municipal waste may, however, be classified as a hazardous waste. See generally City of Chi. v. Envtl. Def. Fund, 511 U.S. 328 (1994).


\(^{31}\) See generally 40 C.F.R. pt. 263 (RCRA generator requirements).
of hazardous waste, and Subtitle C requirements largely stop at the point that a hazardous waste is inserted in the recycling process. Generators that produce 100 kilograms per month or less of hazardous waste, known as “conditionally exempt small quantity generators” or “CESQGs,” are largely exempt from RCRA requirements. Wastes produced by CESQGs are not subject to a manifest requirement and may be disposed of in municipal solid waste landfills.

II. RESTRICTIONS ON THE EXPORT OF HAZARDOUS WASTE FROM THE UNITED STATES UNDER STATUTE AND INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT

EPA’s regulatory treatment of the export of hazardous waste is largely governed by the provisions of RCRA, but a series of international agreements governing the export of wastes also address the export of hazardous waste to Canada, Mexico, and other OECD countries.

A. Statutory Requirements Under RCRA

Section 3017 of RCRA, adopted as an amendment to RCRA in 1984, establishes the basic statutory requirements governing the export of hazardous waste. Section 3017 provides several legal bases for the establishment and enforcement of export controls under RCRA. First, section 3017(a) directly imposes a prohibition on the export of a Subtitle C hazardous waste “unless” the exporter either 1) complies with congressionally
defined “notice and consent” requirements or 2) the export “conforms” with any applicable international agreement governing the export of hazardous wastes.37 Thus, section 3017(a) provides for two distinct sets of export requirements: a congressionally defined “base” program (applicable in the absence of any international agreement) and requirements established by any subsequent international agreement.38 EPA is required to adopt regulations implementing the requirements of section 3017, including both the “base” program and any international agreements.39 Exports in violation of these statutory prohibitions, as well as violation of EPA

37 Section 3017(a) provides:
Beginning twenty-four months after November 8, 1984, no person shall export any hazardous waste identified or listed under this subchapter unless
(1)(A) such person has provided the notification required in subsection (c) of this section,
(B) the government of the receiving country has consented to accept such hazardous waste,
(C) a copy of the receiving country's written consent is attached to the manifest accompanying each waste shipment, and
(D) the shipment conforms with the terms of the consent of the government of the receiving country required pursuant to subsection (e) of this section, or
(2) the United States and the government of the receiving country have entered into an agreement as provided for in subsection (f) of this section and the shipment conforms with the terms of such agreement.
Id. § 3017(a). This subsection is curiously phrased to suggest that the “base” program or international agreements are alternative methods to satisfy the export prohibition. In other words, section 3017(a) reads as if exports are allowed if they satisfy either the requirements of the base program or any applicable international agreement. Section 3017(f), however, expressly provides that if an international agreement exists, then only the requirements of section 3017(a)(2) and certain reporting requirements apply. Id. § 3017(f). The legislative history of section 3017 clearly indicates that Congress intended that exporters must comply with any international agreement, rather than the base program, after such an agreement goes into effect. See H.R. Rep. No. 98-1133, at 46–47, 115 (1984) (Conf. Rep.) reprinted in 1984 U.S.C.C.A.N. 5649 (stating that under the provisions adopted by the conference committee, the requirements of the base program “do not apply if there exists an international agreement between the U.S. and the receiving country establishing hazardous waste export procedures.”).

38 Sections 3017(c)–(f) contain additional details on the requirements for the “base” program. RCRA §§ 3017(c)–(f) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 6938(c)–(f) (2006)).

39 Section 3017(b) requires EPA to adopt regulations “necessary to implement this section.” Id. at § 3017(b). Thus, on its face, section 3017(b) provides authority to implement the base program specified in section 3017(a)(1) and the requirement relating to international agreements in section 3017(a)(2). Additionally, section 2002(a)(1) grants the Administrator the authority to adopt “such regulations as are necessary to carry out his functions” under RCRA. Id. at 2002(a)(1) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6912(a)(1) (2006)).
Export regulations, would presumably be in violation of RCRA.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, RCRA makes it a criminal violation to knowingly export in a manner that is not “in conformance” with an international agreement.\textsuperscript{41} Thus, it appears that, under RCRA, a private party could be subject to civil and criminal liability for violation of an applicable international agreement.\textsuperscript{42}

Additionally, section 3017(h) expressly provides EPA with the authority to implement export regulations that are broader in scope than those required by the section 3017(a)(1) base program. Section 3017(h) provides:

(h) Other standards

Nothing in this section shall preclude the Administrator from establishing other standards for the export of hazardous wastes under section 6922 of this title or section 6923 of this title.\textsuperscript{43}

Thus, EPA is authorized under RCRA to establish more stringent regulation of hazardous waste exports if justified under the basic authority of Subtitle C applicable to regulation of generators and transporters.\textsuperscript{44} This authority is, however, limited to imposing restrictions on exports to countries with which the United States does not have an applicable international agreement.\textsuperscript{45}

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\textsuperscript{40} Section 3008(g) provides for civil penalties for violation of “any requirement of this subchapter [i.e., Subpart C of RCRA].” RCRA § 3008(g) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6928(g) (2006)). Section 7002(a)(1)(A) provides for citizen suits against persons who violate “requirement” or “prohibition” of RCRA generally. \textit{Id.} at § 3008(g) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6972(a)(1)(A) (2006)).
\textsuperscript{41} § 3008(d)(6)(B) provides criminal penalties for “any person who . . . knowingly exports a hazardous waste”:

\begin{quote}
where there exists an international agreement between the United States and the government of the receiving country establishing notice, export, and enforcement procedures for the transportation, treatment, storage, and disposal of hazardous wastes, in a manner which is not in conformance with such agreement.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{42} The domestic legal status of international export agreements is discussed below. \textit{See infra} notes 275–335 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{43} RCRA § 3017(h) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(h) (2006)).
\textsuperscript{44} The significance of this authority is discussed below. \textit{See infra} notes 370–75 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{45} RCRA § 3017(f) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(f) (2006)).
B. Bilateral Agreements with Canada and Mexico

In 1986, the United States entered into two bilateral agreements governing the import and export of hazardous wastes. Not surprisingly these agreements are with our neighbors, Canada and Mexico, and, as discussed below, the vast bulk of reported exports of hazardous waste involved movements to these countries. Neither the Canada nor the Mexico Agreement is a treaty ratified by the Senate; rather both have the status of international executive agreements.

The agreement between Canada and the United States addresses the import and export of hazardous waste and municipal solid waste between the countries. The Canada/U.S. Agreement establishes a basic “notice and consent” system for transboundary shipments of “hazardous waste” for “treatment, storage or disposal.” Indeed, the stated purpose of the agreement is to encourage transboundary shipments of hazardous waste to ensure economically efficient disposal. Notice must be provided by the designated authority of the exporting country to the designated authority of the importing country. The definition of hazardous wastes

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46 International Waste Agreements, U.S. Env'tl. Prot. Agency, http://www.epa.gov/osw/hazard/international/agree.htm (last visited Nov. 8, 2011); see also Statement of Robert Heiss, Joint U.S.-Canada Industry Workshop, supra note 9. The Canada and Mexico agreements address both the export and import of hazardous wastes. See id. The United States, however, has also entered into limited treaties authorizing the importation of waste from other countries. See id.

47 See infra notes 238–48 and accompanying text.

48 See infra notes 282–89 and accompanying text.


50 See Canada/U.S. Agreement, supra note 49, arts. 2, 3(a).


52 Canada/U.S. Agreement, supra note 49, art. 3(a). For the United States, the designated authority is the EPA; for Canada, the designated authority is the Department of the Environment. Id. art. 1(a).
under United States law for purposes of the agreement includes “hazardous waste subject to a manifest requirement.” Notification requires submission of a limited set of information, and if no objection or conditions are imposed within thirty days of receipt of notice, consent is presumed.

In 1986, the United States and Mexico also entered into an agreement governing the transboundary movement of hazardous waste. This agreement, like the Canada/U.S. Agreement, is based on notice and consent requirements. Notification must be provided to the designated government authority at least forty-five days prior to shipment, and consent is not presumed from a failure to respond to the notice. “Hazardous waste” is simply defined through reference to domestic regulation. The Mexico/U.S. Agreement specifically defines the “activities” to which it applies, to include recycling, reuse, and “other utilization” in addition to disposal, treatment, and storage. In addition to hazardous wastes, other portions of the Mexico/U.S. Agreement also address the transboundary movement of hazardous substances, including pesticides.

C. The OECD Decision on the Export of Hazardous Waste for Recycling

The OECD has issued a number of Directives relating to the movement of hazardous waste among member countries. In 1992, the OECD

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53 Id. art. 1(b).
54 See id. art. 3(d).
56 Mexico/U.S. Agreement, supra note 55, art. III.2.
57 Id. art. I.2.
58 Id. art. 1.4.
59 Id. arts. V–VII.
60 See Revisions to the Requirements for: Transboundary Shipments of Hazardous Wastes Between OECD Member Countries, 75 Fed. Reg. 1236, 1238–39 (Jan. 8, 2010) for a discussion of the history of the OECD Decisions addressing the movement of hazardous...
adopted a decision that first established a series of requirements on OECD members regarding the movement of hazardous waste among members for the purpose of recycling. In 2001, the OECD issued revisions to the 1992 Decision that were designed in part to “harmonize” OECD requirements with those of the Basel Convention. The OECD subsequently added an addendum and appendices and issued the revised document as “Decision of the Council Concerning the Control of Transboundary Movements of Wastes Destined for Recovery Operations.” This 2001 OECD Decision, as amended, currently applies to the movement of hazardous wastes for recycling among OECD members.

The OECD Decision establishes a two-tier system for “green” and “amber” wastes. For the hazardous “amber” wastes, it establishes a “notice and consent” regime that is similar, but more detailed, than that specified in the Mexico and Canada Agreements. Among other things, the OECD Decision requires contracts between the exporter and the recycling facility and use of “movement documents” that accompany the wastes, requires facilities recycling the waste to provide notice of receipt of the wastes and issue a “certificate of recovery” upon completion of the recycling, provides for “tacit” consent when the importing country does not respond to a notice within thirty days, provides for designation of “pre-consented” recycling facilities that have different notice and consent

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63 See id.

64 See id. at ch. II(A)(7)–(9).

65 Id. at ch. II(B)(2).

66 Compare OECD Decision, supra note 62, ch. II(D) with Mexico/U.S. Agreement, supra note 55, art. III and Canada/U.S. Agreement, supra note 49, art. 3-4.

67 OECD Decision, supra note 62, ch. II(D)(2), at Case 1.

68 Id.

69 Id.
requirements, and requires consent of any transit country as well as the importing country. The OECD Decision specifically requires the exporting country to readmit any amber wastes that cannot be recycled pursuant to the original consent or at an alternate approved recycling facility.

D. The Significance of the Basel Convention to U.S. Exports

The Basel Convention on the Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal is the primary multinational agreement that deals with the import and export of hazardous waste. The Convention establishes a “notice and consent” regime that requires notification of and consent from the receiving and transit countries for trade in the disposal and recycling of hazardous wastes and municipal wastes. Among other things, Basel requires that trade in hazardous

70 Id. at Case 2.
71 Id. at Cases 1–2.
72 Id.
73 Basel, supra note 3.
74 Notification Concerning the Basel Convention’s Potential Implications for Hazardous Waste Exports and Imports, 57 Fed. Reg. 20,602, 20,603 (May 13, 1992). EPA issued a Federal Register notice shortly after the effective date of the Basel Convention in which it described the terms of the Convention as follows:

The Basel Convention’s main goal is to protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects that may result from mismanagement or careless international movements of hazardous and other wastes. The Convention seeks a reduction in waste generation, a reduction in transboundary waste movements consistent with environmentally sound and efficient waste management, and sets a standard of environmentally sound management for those waste movements that do occur. Wastes covered by the Convention include hazardous wastes, household wastes, and residues arising from the incineration of household wastes.

The Convention controls the transboundary movement of these wastes from one Party to another. Before a transboundary movement of hazardous or other wastes may occur, the exporting country must notify in writing the countries of import and transit and must obtain their consent. The shipment cannot proceed until the exporting country has received written consent from the importing country and any transit countries as well as confirmation of the existence of a waste management contract between the exporter and the importer. Both the exporting and importing countries are obligated to prohibit a transboundary movement if there is reason to believe that the waste will not be managed in an environmentally sound manner in the importing country.

Id. at 20,603.
wastes be allowed only if the waste will be managed in an “environmentally sound manner.” Basel also prohibits the trade in waste between parties and nonparties. Article 11, however, provides that trade between parties and nonparties is authorized if pursuant to a separate bilateral, multilateral, or regional agreement that is consistent with the aims and purposes of the Convention (for a pre-existing agreement) or that contains provisions that “do not derogate from the environmentally sound management” required by the Convention (for newly negotiated agreements).

The United States has signed, but not ratified, the Basel Convention, and it remains among the very few countries that are not parties. Thus, virtually every country on earth would be prohibited from consenting to a shipment of hazardous wastes from the United States unless pursuant to an international agreement that satisfies the requirements of Article 11 of Basel. EPA has taken the position that the OECD Decision and the Canada and Mexico Agreements satisfy these requirements. EPA has specifically stated that the OECD Decision C(92)39 constitutes a “pre-existing” agreement, and adoption of the EPA regulations pursuant to the OECD Decision allows trade with OECD countries to continue in compliance with the Basel Convention.

III. EPA’S REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE EXPORT OF HAZARDOUS WASTE

In 1986, EPA promulgated a relatively simple, single set of “notice and consent” export requirements. At that time, the United States had not entered into the bilateral agreements with Mexico and Canada and the OECD had not issued a binding directive on the transboundary movement of wastes. Thus, these regulations were exclusively governed by EPA’s

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75 Basel, supra note 3, art. 4.8.
76 Id. art. 4.5.
77 Id. art. 11.
78 As discussed below, the Senate consented to ratification of the Basel Convention in 1992, and the United States has not “ratified” the Convention because it has not submitted documentation to the Basel Secretariat. See infra notes 338–40 and accompanying text.
79 See supra note 3 and accompanying text.
81 See id.
authority to establish a “base” program under section 3017(a)(1). The original regulations have since morphed into a confusing array of differing regulatory programs that vary depending on the destination, the type of wastes, and their means of disposal or recycling. With apologies, the following section contains a detailed description of eight different sets of export regulations promulgated by EPA.

A. General Requirements: Subpart E

Part 262, Subpart E contains the regulations generally applicable to the export of hazardous wastes under RCRA. Indeed, these general Subpart E regulations are the “default” export regulations and apply to all exports of hazardous waste unless other explicit export provisions apply. The application of Subpart E to wastes exported to OECD countries is particularly complex (and confusing). Canada and Mexico, both OECD countries, are subject to the Subpart E regulations whether the export is for disposal or recycling. The export of hazardous waste for disposal to all other OECD countries is also subject to the Subpart E regulations. Exports of hazardous wastes for recycling to OECD countries (other than Canada and Mexico) are, however, subject to the Subpart H regulations discussed below in lieu of the Subpart E regulations. EPA has described, but not explained, this distinction.

83 RCRA § 3017(a) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. 6938(a) (2006)).
85 40 C.F.R. §§ 262.50–52.
86 40 C.F.R. § 262.58(a).
87 When EPA adopted the Subpart H regulations, EPA specifically excluded Canada and Mexico from their coverage. The preamble to the 1996 regulation states: Although Canada is subject to the Decision, movements of waste between the U.S. and Canada that otherwise would be governed by the Decision will continue to be controlled by the U.S./Canada bilateral agreement. Implementation of OECD Council Decision, 61 Fed. Reg. 16,290, 16,298 n.7 (Apr. 12, 1996).

The preamble also states: Mexico joined the OECD in June 1994. Movements of waste between the U.S. and Mexico will continue to be controlled by the U.S./Mexico bilateral agreement and EPA’s current regulations, until such time as the U.S. and Mexico agree to switch to procedures under the OECD Decision. Id. at 16,298 n.8. EPA’s decision to apply the bilateral agreements, rather than the OECD Decision, to exports to Canada and Mexico requires somewhat more justification. Presumably, EPA has concluded that the country specific bilateral agreements “trump” the OECD Decision, but it is not clear why. The OECD Decision was adopted after the
Covered Wastes. The Subpart E regulations explicitly apply only to the export of Subtitle C “hazardous waste.” The regulations also implicitly apply only to hazardous wastes that are subject to the manifest requirement in Part 262, Subpart B. This limitation arises solely through the definition of “primary exporter” which includes “any person who is required to originate the manifest for a shipment of hazardous waste.” Drafting notwithstanding, EPA has otherwise expressly stated that the Subpart E regulations only apply to Subtitle C hazardous wastes that are subject to a manifest requirement.

Persons Subject to Requirements. Most requirements under Subpart E apply to the “primary exporter” of hazardous waste; it is the “primary exporter” who is subject to the requirement to provide notice of intent to export, and who is subject to most record-keeping and reporting requirements. The “primary exporter” is defined as the person who is “required to originate the manifest for a shipment of hazardous waste in accordance with 40 C.F.R. part 262, subpart B.” Under the cited regulations, the person who is required to originate the manifest for a shipment

bilateral agreements, and although the OECD Decision is more detailed and, in some respects, more stringent than the bilateral agreements, it is not directly contradictory. In other words, an export could comply with both the requirements of the OECD Decision and the bilateral agreement. There is nothing in the OECD Decision that states that OECD members can comply with specific bilateral agreements in lieu of the Decision. Indeed, the 2001 OECD Decision notes that OECD members may be obligated to comply with other international agreements in addition to the OECD Decision, including the Basel Convention and regulations of the European Community governing both the disposal and recycling of wastes. OECD Decision, supra note 62, at “Instructions for Completing the Notification and Movement Documents: Introduction.” If, as EPA has stated, the OECD Decision is binding, it is worth some explanation as to why exports to Mexico and Canada for recycling should not meet the same Subpart H requirements that apply to exports to other OECD countries.

88 40 C.F.R. § 262.50. Although hazardous waste is not defined in the Subpart E regulations, EPA’s Subtitle C regulatory definitions of solid and hazardous waste would apply. See id. § 260.10.
89 40 C.F.R. § 262.51.
91 40 C.F.R. § 262.53(a) (“primary exporter” required to provide notice of intent to export); § 262.55 (“primary exporter” required to file exception report); § 262.56(a) (“primary exporter” required to file annual reports).
92 40 C.F.R. § 262.51.
of hazardous waste is the “generator,”93 and the generator is defined as
the person whose action first creates the hazardous waste.94 Thus, the
original generator of the exported waste would appear to be the “primary
exporter” subject to regulation under Subpart E.

Notice Requirement. The primary exporter of hazardous waste
must provide notification of its intent to export at least sixty days prior
to export.95 The notification must be sent to EPA, and it must contain cer-
tain general information about the waste, its proposed means of disposal
or recycling, the countries through which the waste will transit, and the
country that will finally receive the waste.96 The single notification may
cover export activities for up to a year.97 EPA, in conjunction with the State
Department, is responsible for providing notification to the receiving
country and any countries through which the waste will transit.98

Consent Requirements. The waste may be exported only if the
receiving country consents to the shipment.99 Upon receipt of consent
from the receiving country, the United States Embassy of that country
will issue an “Acknowledgment of Consent.”100 This document must accom-
pany the shipment.101 If the receiving country objects to the shipment,
EPA will notify the primary exporter. Transit countries, although notified,
may not block the shipment of wastes under these provisions of RCRA; the
regulations merely provide that EPA will inform the primary exporter of
“any responses” by the transit countries.102

Manifest Requirement. The exported wastes are subject to the basic
RCRA manifest requirement, but some special requirements apply.103 The
RCRA manifest of wastes intended for export, for example, must include
the “consignee” of the waste and the point of exit from the United States.104

93 40 C.F.R. § 260.20.
94 40 C.F.R. § 262.10.
95 40 C.F.R. § 262.53(a).
96 Id.
97 Id.
98 40 C.F.R. § 262.53(e).
99 40 C.F.R. § 262.52(b).
100 40 C.F.R. §§ 262.51, 262.52(c).
101 40 C.F.R. § 262.52(c).
102 40 C.F.R. § 262.53(f). Section 3017(a) does not address requirements for countries through
which hazardous waste exports may transit. See generally RCRA § 3017 (codified as amended
at 42 U.S.C. § 6938 (2006)). EPA exercised its authority under section 3017(h) to establish
a requirement that transit countries receive notice. See Hazardous Waste Management
103 40 C.F.R. § 262.54.
104 40 C.F.R. § 262.54(a)–(c).
**Exception Reporting.** A primary exporter must file an “exception report” with EPA if the exporter has not received 1) a signed copy of the manifest from the transporter within forty-five days of the date the wastes were accepted for transport by the initial transporter, or 2) a written confirmation from the consignee that the wastes have been received within ninety days of the date the wastes were accepted for transport by the initial transporter, or if 3) the waste is returned to the United States.\(^{105}\)

**Duty to Reimport.** The regulations require that if a shipment cannot be delivered to the designated or alternate consignee, the primary exporter must notify the transporter to return the waste to the primary exporter.\(^{106}\)

**Reporting and Record-keeping Requirements.** The primary exporter is required to submit an “annual report” with EPA that summarizes “the types, quantities, frequency, and ultimate destination of all hazardous waste exported during the previous calendar year.”\(^{107}\) Exporters of greater than 1000 kilograms per year of hazardous waste must also, in even-numbered years, report on their efforts to reduce the quantity and toxicity of waste generated.\(^{108}\) Primary exporters are also required to keep most documents, including their Notice of Intent and Acknowledgment of Consent, for at least three years.\(^{109}\)

**Transporter Requirements.** Subpart E contains no specific requirements applicable to the transporters of hazardous waste for export. Transporters are, however, subject to limited export requirements including a prohibition on accepting a hazardous waste for export that does not conform to an Acknowledgment of Consent that, in most cases, must be attached to the manifest.\(^{110}\) Transporters must also sign the manifest and give a copy to the customs agent at the point of departure from the United States.\(^{111}\)


\(^{106}\) 40 C.F.R. § 262.54(g).

\(^{107}\) 40 C.F.R. § 262.56(a).

\(^{108}\) Id. Domestic generators of hazardous waste are required to submit biennial reports that describe their “waste minimization” efforts. See id. § 262.41. The export regulations apparently exclude small quantity exporters (100–1000 kilograms per month) of hazardous waste from this requirement. Id. § 262.56(a).

\(^{109}\) 40 C.F.R. § 262.57(a).

\(^{110}\) 40 C.F.R. §§ 262.50, 263.20(a)(2). There are different requirements for use of manifests in shipments by rail or by water. Id. at § 263.20(e)–(f).

\(^{111}\) 40 C.F.R. § 263.20(g).
B. **OECD Recycling: Subpart H**

In 1996, EPA adopted a new Subpart H to 40 C.F.R. Part 262 that governs the import and export of wastes for recycling to countries in the OECD other than Canada and Mexico.\(^{112}\) The Subpart H regulations were amended in 2010 to implement the revised 2001 OECD Decision that now governs the transboundary movement of hazardous waste for recycling within the OECD.\(^{113}\) The Subpart H regulations are more detailed and extensive than the Subpart E regulations.

**Covered Materials.** Under the Subpart H regulations, covered materials include “wastes” that are both 1) defined as hazardous wastes under Subtitle C\(^{114}\) and 2) are either subject to the RCRA manifest requirement or to “universal waste” management standards.\(^{115}\)

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\(^{112}\) 40 C.F.R. §§ 262.80–.89; Implementation of OECD Council Decision C(92)39, 61 Fed. Reg. 16,290 (Apr. 12, 1996). For purposes of Subpart H the OECD countries include: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. 40 C.F.R. §§ 262.58(a)(1), 262.80(a). Since the last revision to the Subpart H regulations in 2010, four countries, Chile, Estonia, Israel, and Slovenia, have joined the OECD. See **List of OECD Countries-Ratification of the Convention on the OECD** on the OECD website, http://www.oecd.org/ (follow “List of OECD Countries” hyperlink at the bottom of the page, then follow “Dates of Accession” hyperlink under the heading “Useful Links”) (last visited Nov. 8, 2011). Apparently these countries have requested an extended period of time to comply with the OECD Decision, and when they have complied, trade in recyclable hazardous waste with other OECD countries will be authorized. Email from Eva Kreisler, U.S. Envtl. Prot. Agency, Office of Int’l Enforcement Compliance Div., to Jeffrey M. Gaba, Professor of Law, Dedman Sch. of Law (Dec. 13, 2010) (on file with author). At that point, EPA will revise the list of applicable OECD countries to which Subpart H applies. Id. Canada and Mexico, although members of the OECD, are subject to these requirements only for wastes that transit their borders. 40 C.F.R. § 262.58(a)(2). The export and import of hazardous wastes for recycling from or to Mexico or Canada is governed by the general Subpart E regulations covering the import and export of hazardous wastes. See **supra** notes 86–87 and accompanying text.

\(^{113}\) OECD Decision, supra note 62, at ch.I.I.


\(^{115}\) 40 C.F.R. § 262.80(a)(2). The Universal Waste rule, discussed below, establishes a separate program for management of certain batteries, pesticides, and mercury-containing equipment. See **infra** notes 152–64 and accompanying text.
Subpart H also only applies to the export of hazardous wastes that are destined for “recovery operations.” These are defined as “activities leading to resource recovery, recycling, reclamation, direct re-use or alternative uses” as listed in the OECD Decision. The list of “recovery actions” in Subpart H is similar to the recycling activities covered in the EPA definition of solid waste, but materials being exported to engage in recovery actions that are not covered by the EPA regulatory definition would not be subject to Subpart H since they would not be a RCRA hazardous waste.

**Amber and Green Waste Classification.** Although the Subpart H regulations only apply to Subtitle C hazardous wastes, the regulations incorporate the OECD classification of “green” and “amber” wastes. Under the Subpart H regulations, all materials classified as Subtitle C hazardous wastes are classified as “amber” wastes regardless of their classification in the OECD appendices. Subtitle C hazardous wastes that are not specified on the OECD lists are also classified as amber wastes. Thus, all Subtitle C hazardous wastes sent to the specified OECD countries for recycling are subject to Subpart H requirements applicable to amber wastes.

Somewhat confusingly, the Subpart H regulations also state that:

a waste is considered hazardous under U.S. national procedures, and hence subject to this subpart, if the waste:

(1) Meets the Federal definition of hazardous waste in 40 CFR 261.3; and

(2) Is subject to either the Federal RCRA manifesting requirements at 40 CFR part 262, subpart B, the universal waste management standards of 40 CFR part 273, State requirements analogous to 40 CFR part 273, the export requirements in the spent lead-acid battery management standards of 40 CFR part 266, subpart G, or State requirements analogous to the export requirements in 40 CFR part 266, subpart G.

40 C.F.R. § 262.89(a). This different phrasing picks up a cross-reference in the spent acid-lead batteries (“SLAB”) regulations that apply to Subpart H regulations to the export of SLABs to the OECD for recycling.

40 C.F.R. § 262.80(a).

116 40 C.F.R. § 262.81.

117 OECD Decision, supra note 62, at app. 5B.

118 40 C.F.R. § 261.2(c).

119 40 C.F.R. § 262.89(d).

120 40 C.F.R. § 262.89(b).

121 40 C.F.R. § 262.83(c).

122 Wastes classified as nonhazardous “green” wastes under Subpart H may be classified as amber wastes by importing or transit countries; in that case, “[a]ll responsibilities of the U.S. importer/exporter shift to the importer/exporter of the OECD Member country that considers the waste hazardous unless the parties make other arrangements through contracts.” 40 C.F.R. § 262.82(a)(2)(iii).
Mixtures of green wastes and amber wastes are subject to amber control only if the mixture would be hazardous under U.S. national procedures.\textsuperscript{124} Thus, under EPA’s mixture rule, mixtures of characteristic hazardous waste (classified as an “amber” waste) and nonhazardous (classified as a “green” waste) would not be subject to the Subpart H requirements if the mixture did not exhibit a hazardous characteristic.

\textit{Regulation of Green List Wastes.} The Subpart H regulations purport to apply only to Subtitle C hazardous wastes. Nonetheless, EPA has included a provision in Subpart H that green list wastes are subject to “existing controls normally applied to commercial transactions.”\textsuperscript{125} This language, although consistent with the OECD Decision, simply cannot create any enforceable obligation under RCRA since both the applicability provisions of Subpart H and section 3017 are limited to regulation of Subtitle C hazardous wastes.

\textit{Persons Subject to Subpart H Requirements.} Under Subpart H, the “exporter” of the hazardous wastes is required to submit the Notice of Intent and execute a contract with the receiving facility.\textsuperscript{126} The “exporter” is defined as

\begin{quote}
[T]he person under the jurisdiction of the exporting country who has, or will have at the time the planned transfrontier movement commences, possession or other forms of legal
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{124} 40 C.F.R. § 262.82(a)(3). EPA has stated:
EPA has revised the text in § 262.82(a) to clarify that only those wastes and waste mixtures considered hazardous under U.S. national regulations will be subject to the Amber control procedures within the United States. This is consistent with longstanding EPA policy, and should minimize confusion for the regulated community. For example, under the existing RCRA hazardous waste regulations, any mixture of an Amber waste that exhibits one or more of the hazardous characteristics of ignitability, corrosivity, reactivity, or toxicity under RCRA with a Green waste shall be considered an Amber waste if the mixture still exhibits one or more of the RCRA hazardous waste characteristics and, thus, be subject to the Amber control procedures. Conversely, if the resulting mixture no longer exhibits one or more of the RCRA hazardous characteristics, it will instead be considered a Green waste, and be subject to the Green control procedures.

\textsuperscript{125} 40 C.F.R. § 262.82(a)(1)(i).
\textsuperscript{126} The exporter is the entity required to provide the Notice of Intent to export and to satisfy the reporting and record-keeping requirements. See 40 C.F.R. § 262.83(b).
control of the wastes and who proposes their transfrontier movement for the ultimate purpose of submitting them to recovery operations. When the United States (U.S.) is the exporting country, notifier is interpreted to mean a person domiciled in the U.S.\textsuperscript{127}

An exporter can be a “recognized trader” who has control over the waste.\textsuperscript{128}

This definition of “exporter” is clearly different from the one that applies to “primary exporters” under Subpart E. Under Subpart E, the hazardous waste generator is the primary exporter subject to the export requirements.\textsuperscript{129} Under Subpart H, a different class of persons who have control over the waste and proposes to export of wastes is subject to the requirements applicable to “exporters.”\textsuperscript{130}

The record-keeping and exception reporting requirements, in contrast, apply to the “primary exporter” as defined in the Subpart E regulations or the person who initiates the movement document.\textsuperscript{131}

**Notice Requirements.** The exporter must provide written notification to EPA prior to undertaking the export of the hazardous waste.\textsuperscript{132} Notice requirements vary depending on whether or not the wastes are being sent to a “pre-approved” facility.\textsuperscript{133} If wastes are being sent to a facility that has not been pre-approved, notice to EPA must be provided at least forty-five days prior to shipment.\textsuperscript{134} If the wastes are being sent to a “pre-approved” facility, notification must be provided ten days before shipment.\textsuperscript{135}

**Consent Requirements.** Shipments may not occur without proper consent from the importing and transit countries.\textsuperscript{136} Consent may be provided in writing, but the regulations also provide for “tacit consent.”\textsuperscript{137}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{127} See 40 C.F.R. § 262.81(g).
\item \textsuperscript{128} 40 C.F.R. § 262.86(b). A “recognized trader” is defined as “a person who, with appropriate authorization of concerned countries, acts in the role of principal to purchase and subsequently sell wastes; this person has legal control of such wastes from time of purchase to time of sale; such a person may act to arrange and facilitate transfrontier movements of wastes destined for recovery operations.” Id. § 262.81(i).
\item \textsuperscript{129} See 40 C.F.R. § 262.51.
\item \textsuperscript{130} See 40 C.F.R. § 262.87.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{132} 40 C.F.R. § 262.83.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Id.
\item \textsuperscript{134} 40 C.F.R. § 262.83(b)(1).
\item \textsuperscript{135} 40 C.F.R. § 262.83(b)(2).
\item \textsuperscript{136} 40 C.F.R. § 262.83.
\item \textsuperscript{137} Id.
\end{itemize}
Tacit consent allows a waste shipment to proceed if no written objection is received within some set period of time after the importing country acknowledges receipt of a notice of intent to export.\textsuperscript{138}

\textit{Movement Document Requirements.} All shipments of amber wastes must be accompanied by a “movement document” similar to a RCRA manifest.\textsuperscript{139} For the portion of the shipment occurring within the United States, a RCRA manifest must also accompany the shipment.\textsuperscript{140}

\textit{Contract Requirements.} All shipments are prohibited unless pursuant to a “valid written contract, chain of contracts or equivalent arrangements (when the movement occurs between parties controlled by the same corporate or legal entity).”\textsuperscript{141} Among other things, the contract must specify which party will be responsible for alternate management of the waste if its disposition cannot be carried out as described in the notification.\textsuperscript{142}

\textit{Compliance with Other International Agreements.} The Subpart H regulations purport to require compliance with other international agreements to which the shipment may be subject.\textsuperscript{143} The regulations identify, as examples, a variety of international agreements relating to transit of goods.\textsuperscript{144} It is unclear, and unlikely, that the regulations make violation of these other international agreements a violation of RCRA itself and therefore subject to RCRA penalties and citizen suits.

\textit{Duty to Reimport.} The regulations also contain provisions requiring the return of wastes if the shipment is not completed.\textsuperscript{145}

\textit{Exception Reporting.} Persons who are classified as “primary exporters” or who initiate the movement document are required to make an “exception” report to EPA if 1) they have not received a copy of the tracking document within forty-five days after it was accepted by the initial

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[138] For wastes being sent to a facility that has not been pre-approved, the shipment may commence if the country has not provided a written objection or if the country has failed to respond within thirty days of issuance of an “Acknowledgement of Receipt” of a Notice of Intent by the country of import. 40 C.F.R. § 262.83(b)(1). If the shipment is to a pre-approved facility, the shipment may generally commence within seven days of issuance of an Acknowledgement of Receipt of a notice by the importing country. See id. § 262.83(b)(2).
\item[139] 40 C.F.R. § 262.84.
\item[141] 40 C.F.R. § 262.85(a).
\item[142] 40 C.F.R. § 262.85(c).
\item[143] 40 C.F.R. § 262.82(b)(2). The issue of whether section 3017 gives domestic effect to international agreements is discussed below, infra notes 275–78 and accompanying text.
\item[144] 40 C.F.R. § 262.82(b)(2).
\item[145] 40 C.F.R. § 262.85(c)(2).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
transporter, 2) they have not received written confirmation from the recovery facility that the waste was received within ninety days after it was accepted by the initial transporter, or 3) if “[t]he waste is returned to the United States.”

Reporting and Record-keeping Requirements. Primary exporters or persons who initiate the movement document must file an annual report with EPA that summarizes “the types, quantities, frequency, and ultimate destination of all such hazardous waste exported during the previous calendar year.” These persons are also required to submit a biennial report on their efforts to reduce the quantity and toxicity of each hazardous waste exported “except for hazardous waste produced by exporters of greater than one hundred kilograms but less than 1000 kilograms per calendar month.” The phrasing is odd since “exporters” may not “produce” waste. Primary exporters and persons who initiate the movement document are also required to keep most documents, including their Notice of Intent and Acknowledgement of Consent, for at least three years.

Transporter Requirements. Transporters “may not” accept waste subject to Subpart H unless it is accompanied by a “tracking document” that satisfies the “movement document” requirements. Transporters are also required to properly sign the manifest and give a copy to the customs agent at point of export.


In order to reduce the cost and complexity of the Subtitle C requirements, EPA, in 1995, promulgated a set of reduced requirements for a limited class of “universal wastes.” “Universal wastes” include certain batteries, pesticides, mercury-containing equipment, and most electric lamp bulbs. These universal waste rules, contained in 40 C.F.R. Part 273,

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146 40 C.F.R. § 262.87(b).
147 40 C.F.R. § 262.87(a).
148 40 C.F.R. § 262.87(a)(5).
149 40 C.F.R. § 262.87(c).
150 40 C.F.R. § 263.20(a)(2).
151 40 C.F.R. § 263.20(g).
153 40 C.F.R. § 273.1. EPA has recognized that the class of universal wastes may be expanded in the future and established procedures and criteria for adding wastes. Id. §§ 273.80–.81. In general, a petitioner has the burden of demonstrating that a proposed
establish minimal requirements for persons who generate, store, and transport these wastes.\textsuperscript{154} Universal wastes transported within the United States are not, for example, subject to a domestic manifest requirement.\textsuperscript{155}

The Part 273 rules also contain specific requirements relating to the export of universal wastes.\textsuperscript{156} “Handlers” of universal wastes, including both persons who generate and those who store the wastes without disposing or recycling the wastes themselves, are subject to notice and consent requirements.\textsuperscript{157} Universal waste handlers that export to OECD countries are required to comply with the Subpart H regulations.\textsuperscript{158} Handlers that export to non-OECD countries are subject to a specified set of requirements that include many of the requirements of Subpart E that apply to primary exporters, including the requirement to 1) file an “intent to export” notice with EPA, 2) file an “annual report” of export activity, and 3) satisfy record-keeping requirements.\textsuperscript{159} Additionally, universal waste handlers that export to non-OECD countries may only export in compliance with an


\textsuperscript{155} See RCRA TRAINING MODULE, supra note 154. Since export regulations in most cases only apply to hazardous wastes that are subject to a manifest, the Subpart H regulations specifically state that they are applicable to hazardous wastes subject to a manifest or universal waste rules. 40 C.F.R. § 262.80(a).

\textsuperscript{156} See 40 C.F.R. §§ 273.20, 273.40.

\textsuperscript{157} The term “Universal Waste Handler” is defined at 40 C.F.R. § 273.9. EPA regulations distinguish between “large quantity” (those that accumulate 5000 kilograms of universal waste at any one time) and “small quantity” universal waste handlers, but the export requirements are the same for both. Id.

\textsuperscript{158} 40 C.F.R. § 273.20 (export requirements for small quantity handlers); § 273.40 (export requirements for large quantity handlers). The universal waste regulations expressly apply the Subpart H regulations to all universal waste exports to the OECD countries listed at section 262.58(a)(1). Id. § 273.40. This includes the OECD countries other than Canada and Mexico. Unlike the basic scope of Subpart H, this provision appears to apply the universal waste rules to the export of universal wastes for disposal in OECD countries. Id. § 262.58.

\textsuperscript{159} 40 C.F.R. §§ 273.20, 273.40. These include the requirements found at 40 C.F.R. §§ 262.53, 262.56(a)(1)–(4), 262.57.
Acknowledgment of Consent, and this acknowledgment must accompany the shipment.160 “Transporter[s]” of universal waste that are being exported are subject to the requirements of Subpart H if the wastes are destined for an OECD country.161 If the shipment is destined for a non-OECD country, the regulations provide that the transporter may not accept a shipment that does not “conform” to the Acknowledgment of Consent and must “ensure” that a copy of the Acknowledgment of Consent accompanies the shipment and the shipment is delivered to the facility designated by the person initiating the shipment.162

Finally, the universal waste rules explicitly do not apply to the export of household hazardous waste or to wastes generated by Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Generators (“CESQGs”) unless persons “managing” universal wastes choose, “at their option,” to comply with the universal waste rules.163 Household and CESQG universal wastes that are “commingled” with other universal wastes are, however, subject to the universal waste rules.164

D. SLAB: 40 C.F.R. Part 266 Subpart G

Spent lead-acid batteries (“SLABs”) can be recycled by the reclamation of the lead content of the batteries.165 When disposed or reclaimed, SLABs are classified as a RCRA hazardous waste since they can exhibit the characteristics of both toxicity and corrosivity.166 Prior to 2010, reclaimed SLABs were exempt from manifest requirements and thus not subject to the Subpart E or Subpart H export provisions.167 In 2010, however, EPA amended the regulations found at 40 C.F.R. Part 266, Subpart G to provide explicit notice and consent requirements for the export of SLABs.168

160 40 C.F.R. §§ 273.20(b)–(c), 273.40(b)–(c).
161 40 C.F.R. § 273.56.
162 Id.
163 40 C.F.R. § 273.8.
164 Id.
166 Id. at 58,393.
167 Id. at 58,391.
These export requirements apply although EPA still does not require the use of a manifest for domestic transport of SLABs.169

The new rules now impose specific notice and consent requirements for the export of SLABs. Exporters are given the option to comply with the Universal Waste Rules (and its associated export requirements) in lieu of the explicit Part 266 SLAB export requirements.170 For those generators that do not elect to comply with the Universal Waste rules, the new rules do some odd parsing and cross-referencing similar to EPA’s treatment of export requirements for universal wastes. For exporters of SLABs to OECD countries (other than Canada and Mexico), the rules simply require compliance with all of the Subpart H requirements.171 For exports to non-OECD countries (and Canada and Mexico), the SLAB rules cross-reference select portions of Subpart E: these include the Subpart E regulations governing submission of notice of intent to export, most but not all annual reporting requirements and record-keeping.172 Additionally, the SLAB rules themselves expressly prohibit export without an Acknowledgment of Consent and a requirement to provide the transporter with a copy of the Acknowledgment of Consent.173

For non-OECD shipments, there is no requirement for a “movement document” or RCRA manifest to accompany the shipment.174 Rather, generators must provide a copy of the Acknowledgment of Consent to the transporter.175 Transporters are not allowed to accept a shipment that

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169 See id.
170 40 C.F.R. § 266.80(a).
171 40 C.F.R. § 266.80(a)(6).
172 40 C.F.R. § 266.80(a). The regulations cross-reference the requirements applicable to “primary exporters” in 40 C.F.R. §§ 262.53, 262.56(a)(1)–(4),(6),(b), 262.57. For reasons best known to EPA (since not explained in the preamble to the SLAB rules), EPA exempts exporters of SLABs to non-OECD countries from the Subpart E requirement that generators certify in the annual report that they have undertaken efforts to reduce the volume and toxicity of waste generated. See id.
173 40 C.F.R. §266.80.
174 In a nicely circular argument, EPA states that shipments of SLABs: “do not have any shipment tracking documentation requirements or exception reporting requirements because they are exempt from the RCRA hazardous waste manifest requirements and are not required to comply with the movement document requirements in § 262.84.” Revisions to the Requirements for: Transboundary Shipments of Hazardous Wastes Between OECD Member Countries, 75 Fed. Reg. 1236, 1246 (Jan. 8, 2010). In other words, EPA explains that non-OECD shipments do not have shipment tracking requirements because EPA has exempted them from shipment tracking requirements.
175 40 C.F.R. § 266.80(a)(6).
does not “conform” to the Acknowledgment of Consent and must “ensure” that the Acknowledgment of Consent accompanies the shipment and that the shipment is delivered to facility designated in the Acknowledgment of Consent.176

E. Cathode Ray Tubes: 40 C.F.R. 261.4(a)(22)

EPA’s most direct attempt to regulate the export of electronic waste is its 2006 regulation governing the disposal and recycling of cathode ray tubes (“CRTs”) and processed glass from CRTs.177 CRTs include televisions and the older television tubelike computer monitors that are now being supplanted by flat panel liquid crystal displays.178 EPA cites data that indicates that color CRTs are likely to exhibit the toxicity characteristic based on their lead content, and, thus, when CRTs become a solid waste they would likely be classified as a hazardous waste.179 CRTs, however, have potential recyclable value because of the metal content, primarily lead, in the glass on the tube, and to avoid classification and regulation of CRTs as hazardous waste, EPA has established a general set of “conditional” exclusions for CRTs and specific set of requirements applicable to the export of CRTs for recycling.180

A preliminary issue involves determining the point at which used CRTs become solid wastes. EPA’s position varies depending on whether the used CRTs are “intact” or “broken” and whether they are sent for “reuse” or “recycling.”181 In general, EPA claims that:

- Used, intact CRTs that are sent for reuse are not solid wastes and therefore not regulated under RCRA as a hazardous waste.182

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176 40 C.F.R. § 266.80(a)(7).
179 See id. at 42,930–31. EPA’s selective use of the cited data is discussed below.
• Used, intact CRTs that are sent for recycling within the United States are not solid wastes unless speculatively accumulated.\textsuperscript{183}
• Used, intact CRTs that are exported for recycling are solid wastes.\textsuperscript{184}
• Used, “broken” CRTs that are exported for recycling are not solid wastes.\textsuperscript{185}
• Processed glass that has been removed from CRTs for recycling, even if exported, is not a solid waste.\textsuperscript{186}

Thus, all CRTs exported for recycling are classified as a solid waste (and, if they exhibit a hazard characteristic, a hazardous waste) unless otherwise excluded.

EPA has established a set of “conditional exclusions” that apply to CRTs that are exported for recycling.\textsuperscript{187} In general, the regulations

\textsuperscript{183} See 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(22)(i); Hazardous Waste Management System; Modification of the Hazardous Waste Program; Cathode Ray Tubes, 71 Fed. Reg. at 42,929. This position is based on doubtful authority. EPA states that these recycled CRTs are not solid wastes since “EPA does not regulate unused commercial chemical products that are reclaimed.” \textit{Id.} This is a reference to EPA’s definition of solid waste which does not include “commercial chemical products listed in 40 C.F.R. § 261.33” that are reclaimed. 40 C.F.R. § 261.2(c)(3). EPA has on several occasions stated that the reference to “listed” commercial chemical products, in fact, includes all unused commercial chemical products. See GABA & STEVER, supra note 14, at 2:11. EPA can say whatever it wants, but the regulation is limited to commercial chemical products that have been formally designated in 40 C.F.R. § 261.33, and at least one court has rejected EPA’s position. See United States v. Self, 2 F.3d 1071 (10th Cir. 1993).

\textsuperscript{184} See Hazardous Waste Management System; Modification of the Hazardous Waste Program; Cathode Ray Tubes, 71 Fed. Reg. at 42,938. EPA claims that, unlike domestic recycling of unbroken CRTs, unbroken CRT exported for recycling “are not handled as valuable commodities.” \textit{Id.} at 42,938. EPA, however, claims that processed CRT glass exported for recycling is not a solid waste “since there is no information available to us indicating that this material is not handled as a commodity when exported.” \textit{Id.} The issue of EPA’s authority to treat exported hazardous waste differently from domestic hazardous waste is discussed \textit{infra} notes 420–433 and accompanying text.


\textsuperscript{186} 40 C.F.R. § 261.39(c).

\textsuperscript{187} The exclusions apply both to “used, broken” CRTs and “unbroken, intact” CRTs exported for recycling. The conditional exclusions themselves are found at 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(22)(ii)–(iv) which cross-reference the substantive restrictions found at 40 C.F.R. § 261.39–40. Note that compliance with the requirements of the conditional exclusion simply exempts exported CRTs from classification as a solid waste; exporters that do not comply with the conditional exclusion requirements for CRTs would still be in compliance with RCRA if they satisfied the general Subpart E or H requirements for the export of hazardous wastes.
establish a notice and consent regime. However, rather than simply cross-referencing the Subpart E and H regulations, EPA has curiously established similar, but not identical, export requirements through its conditional exclusion, and the regulations do not distinguish between exports to OECD and non-OECD countries.

**Substantive Conditions.** The conditional exclusion includes substantive requirements on the management of the CRTs prior to recycling. These include conditions on proper storage, labeling, and containment during transit. They also include limitations on “speculative accumulation” prior to recycling.

**Covered Person.** The requirements of the conditional exclusion generally apply to “exporters.” Neither the CRT regulation nor the general RCRA regulations contain a definition of “exporter.”

**Notice Requirements.** The exporter is required to submit a “Notice of Intent” to export to EPA within sixty days of the initial shipment. This notice may cover activity for the next twelve months. The information required in the CRT notice is essentially identical to that required under Subpart E and similar to that required under Subpart H.

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188 40 C.F.R. § 261.39(a)(5).
189 This at least raises the question of whether exports of CRTs to OECD countries satisfy the requirements of the OECD Directive. In a remarkable statement, EPA essentially provides an argument for circumventing all OECD requirements. See U.S. ENVTL. PROT. AGENCY, RCRA-2004-0010, RESPONSE TO COMMENTS DOCUMENT (2004). According to EPA, the United States is only obligated to comply with the OECD Directive only for the export of materials classified as hazardous waste under United States law, and, thus, the United States can establish different and less restrictive export requirements for shipments to OECD countries as long as EPA imposes the relaxed requirements through a conditional exclusion from classification as a solid waste. Id. at 21–24. The use of conditional exclusions to circumvent (or curiously to ensure) notice and consent requirements for exports is discussed below, infra note 430 and accompanying text.
190 40 C.F.R. § 261.39(a)(1)–(3).
192 40 C.F.R. § 261.39(a)(5).
193 Id. at 21–24.
194 In the preamble to the CRT rule, EPA stated that it: considered simply requiring exporters of CRTs for recycling to comply with the current notice and consent requirements in 40 CFR part 262. These requirements, however, rely on the hazardous waste manifest and other Subtitle C provisions that EPA is not imposing on used CRTs. Consequently, we are promulgating separate (although very similar) export requirements that will apply exclusively to conditionally exempt CRTs exported for recycling.
Consent Requirements. The export of CRTs for recycling is prohibited without the consent of the receiving country, but consent of the transit country is not required.\textsuperscript{196} This would be the case even if the export were to an OECD country covered by the Subpart H regulations.\textsuperscript{197} EPA provides the exporter with an “Acknowledgment of Consent” from the receiving country.\textsuperscript{198}

Manifest Requirement. There is no manifest requirement for the domestic shipment of CRTs destined for export, but the “Acknowledgment of Consent” must accompany the shipment.\textsuperscript{199}

Exception Reporting. There is no requirement to notify EPA if the exporter does not receive any Acknowledgment of Receipt of the shipment by the recycling facility. Nor is there any requirement that the recycler provide such acknowledgment.

Duty to Reimport. There is no explicit duty to reimport or take back if the wastes cannot be accepted at the recycling facility. Rather, the regulations require “re-notification” if the shipment cannot be delivered to the primary or alternate recycler to “allow” the exporter to send the shipment to a “new recycler.”\textsuperscript{200}

Reporting and Record-keeping. There is no annual reporting requirement and, since exported CRTs are conditionally excluded from classification as a solid waste,\textsuperscript{201} the general reporting requirements applicable to domestic generators of hazardous waste would not apply. Exporters must keep copies of all notices and acknowledgements of consent for a period of three years.\textsuperscript{202}

F. Printed Circuit Boards

Printed circuit boards, recycled to reclaim their metal content, are an item of international commerce.\textsuperscript{203} Although there is significant concern

\textsuperscript{196} See 40 C.F.R. § 261.39(a)(5)(v).
\textsuperscript{197} See, e.g., SEPTEMBER 2008 GAO REPORT, supra notes 114–119 and accompanying text.
\textsuperscript{198} 40 C.F.R. § 261.39(a)(5)(v).
\textsuperscript{199} 40 C.F.R. § 261.39(a)(5)(vii).
\textsuperscript{200} 40 C.F.R. § 261.39(a)(5)(viii).
\textsuperscript{201} 40 C.F.R. § 261.40.
\textsuperscript{202} 40 C.F.R. § 261.39(a)(5)(ix).
\textsuperscript{203} See, e.g., SEPTEMBER 2008 GAO REPORT, supra note 2, at 14–15.
about the environmental and human health effects associated with their recycling.\textsuperscript{204} EPA has exempted printed circuit boards that are recycled from classification as a solid waste.\textsuperscript{205} They are thus exempted from any export requirements.

The exclusion operates in two ways. First, all “scrap metal” that is being recycled is exempt from classification as a solid waste.\textsuperscript{206} EPA has taken the position that whole circuit boards sent for recycling are classified as scrap metal, and thus not regulated as a hazardous waste.\textsuperscript{207} Second, shredded circuit boards sent for recycling are subject to a “conditional exclusion.”\textsuperscript{208} They are exempt only if 1) “[s]tored in containers sufficient to prevent a release to the environment prior to recovery” and 2) “[f]ree of mercury switches, mercury relays and nickel-cadmium batteries and lithium batteries.”\textsuperscript{209} Through these exclusions, scrap metal and printed circuit boards that would otherwise be classified as a hazardous waste are free from any export controls under RCRA.

G. Industrial Ethyl Alcohol

In one curious and well-hidden provision, EPA has excluded industrial ethyl alcohol sent for reclamation from all hazardous waste requirements, but specifically subjected the “person initiating” or the “intermediary arranging” for a shipment to a foreign country to notice and consent export requirements under Subpart E.\textsuperscript{210} This regulation was adopted in 1986 as part of EPA’s original Subpart E regulatory promulgation, and it is one of the few export requirements that apply to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{204} See generally Huabo Duan et al., Examining the Technology Acceptance for Dismantling of Waste Printed Circuit Boards in Light of Recycling and Environmental Concerns, 92 J. Envtl. Mgmt. 392 (2011).
\item \textsuperscript{205} 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(14).
\item \textsuperscript{206} 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(13). “Scrap metal” is defined as “bits and pieces of metal parts (e.g., [sic] bars, turnings, rods, sheets, wire) or metal pieces that may be combined together with bolts or soldering (e.g., radiators, scrap automobiles, railroad box cars), which when worn or superfluous can be recycled.” \textit{Id.} § 261.1(c)(6). It thus does not include other materials that may have high concentrations of metals that are sent for recycling.
\item \textsuperscript{207} See Hazardous Waste Management System; Modification of the Hazardous Waste Program; Cathode Ray Tubes, 71 Fed. Reg. 42,928, 42,930 (July 28, 2006); see also GABA & STEVER, supra note 14, at 2:25 for a discussion of the scope of the “scrap metal” exclusion.
\item \textsuperscript{208} 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(14).
\item \textsuperscript{209} \textit{Id.}
\item \textsuperscript{210} 40 C.F.R. § 261.6(a)(3)(i).
\end{itemize}
a hazardous waste that does not have a domestic manifest requirement.\textsuperscript{211} Although adopted prior to the Subpart H regulations, the regulation provides that its export requirements apply “unless provided otherwise in an international agreement as specified in § 262.58.”\textsuperscript{212} Presumably this would subject industrial ethyl alcohol to the Subpart H requirements if exported for recycling to an OECD country.


In 2008, EPA promulgated a lengthy (and somewhat bizarre) provision that “conditionally exempts” most materials exported for reclamation from classification as a solid waste.\textsuperscript{213} This provision was included as a part of set regulations that “conditionally exempt” reclaimed waste from classification as a hazardous waste.\textsuperscript{214} Under the domestic provisions, “hazardous secondary materials” that are sent for reclamation at facilities “under the control” of the generator are excluded from classification as solid wastes.\textsuperscript{215} Hazardous secondary materials sent for reclamation at a facility operated by a third party, the “transfer-based” exclusion, are also exempt from classification as a solid if a rather elaborate set of conditions is met.\textsuperscript{216}

In addition to the domestic reclamation exclusions, the 2008 regulation provides an express exclusion for “hazardous secondary materials” exported for reclamation.\textsuperscript{217} Although this exclusion does not apply to the

\textsuperscript{211} The explanation has a nice “Dukes of Hazard” quality. EPA explained that it initially declined to impose any domestic regulatory requirements on industrial ethyl alcohol since the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms already imposed notice and tracking requirements similar to RCRA. Hazardous Waste Management System; Exports of Hazardous Waste, 51 Fed. Reg. 28,664, 28,671 (Aug. 8, 1996). EPA stated that “[s]ince notice and tracking requirements are placed on these wastes domestically in lieu of EPA’s requirements, EPA believes that this is the type of waste for which notification and consent should apply for exports. Thus, the final regulation includes an amendment to 40 CFR 261.6 regarding spent industrial ethyl alcohol when exported for recycling.” \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{212} 40 C.F.R. § 261.6(a)(3)(i).

\textsuperscript{213} See 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(25); Revisions to the Definition of Solid Waste, 73 Fed. Reg. 64,668, 64,718 (Oct. 30, 2008). As discussed below, the provision is bizarre because of its apparent complete irrelevance and EPA’s failure to identify any cost implications associated with its promulgation.

\textsuperscript{214} See Gaba, \textit{supra} note 15 for a detailed discussion of these provisions.


\textsuperscript{216} See 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(24).

\textsuperscript{217} 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(25). In addition to the specific conditional export exclusion, EPA also promulgated a mechanism for a generator to make a “non-waste” determination. \textit{Id.}
export of SLABs or CRTs regulated under other specific controls, it would potentially apply to any other hazardous waste exported for reclamation.

Under this “export reclamation exclusion,” EPA establishes a notice and consent requirement, but, as a condition of the exclusion, the regulation incorporates most, but not all, of the substantive requirements applicable to the “transfer-based” domestic exclusion. Unlike the domestic transfer-based exclusion, the export reclamation exclusion does not require that generators determine if the foreign reclaimer satisfies certain financial assurance requirements. Nor is the foreign reclamation facility subject to environmental restrictions that would apply to domestic recyclers.

§ 260.30. Wastes that qualify for the non-waste determination may be exported with no restrictions. Id. § 261.4(c).

218 EPA achieves this limitation by a rather odd bit of cross-referencing. Rather than simply stating that the export exclusion does not apply to CRTs or SLABs, the exclusion requires compliance with certain “third-party” provisions. 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(24)(iii). This section provides that the exclusion does not apply to any material subject to specific conditional exclusion requirements under 261.4 [such as CRTs] or SLAB management requirements.

219 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(25) (The regulation requires as a condition of exclusion that “the hazardous secondary material generator complies with the applicable requirements of paragraphs (a)(24)(i)–(v) of this section (excepting paragraph (a)(v)(B)(2) of this section for foreign reclaimers and foreign intermediate facilities).”). In the preamble to the 2008 rule, EPA stated:

Included by reference in 40 CFR 261.4(a)(25), the generator must comply with the requirements of 40 CFR 261.4(a)(24)(i)–(v), which comprise the hazardous secondary material generator requirements under the transfer-based exclusion, such as speculative accumulation and reasonable efforts.


220 The export reclamation exclusion does not require compliance with the financial assurance requirements at 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(24)(vi)(F). The export reclamation exclusion expressly excludes compliance with section 261.4(a)(24)(v)(B)(2) that requires the generator determine if the foreign recycler has properly notified government entities that the “financial assurance” requirement was met. Id. § 261.4(a)(24).

In an odd argument, EPA explains the decision not to impose these requirements thusly:

Since foreign reclaimers and foreign intermediate facilities are not subject to U.S. regulations, they cannot comply with the notification and financial assurance requirements under [the] rule.

REVISIONS TO THE DEFINITION OF SOLID WASTE, supra note 219, at 2 (quoting Revisions to the Definition of Solid Waste, 73 Fed. Reg. 64,668, 64,698 (Oct. 30, 2008)). This author did not know that the inability to legally compel a foreign entity to comply with a regulatory requirement therefore made it impossible for the facility to comply with the requirement.

221 The export reclamation exclusion, for example, does not require compliance with the condition, applicable to the transfer-based exclusion at § 261.4(a)(24)(D), that the third
The notice and consent requirements of export reclamation exclusion are long and complex and largely parallel the notice requirements in Subpart E and Subpart H. There are, however, some odd quirks. The export reclamation exclusion expressly provides for “tacit consent” for exports to “OECD member countries.” Although EPA generally treats exports to Mexico and Canada differently than exports to other OECD members, this exclusion includes them among OECD countries. Thus, EPA is applying tacit consent authorization for exports to Mexico in a manner not expressly authorized by the Mexico/U.S. Agreement. Additionally, consent for export is only expressly required of the receiving country, but it appears that objections by a transit country can preclude tacit consent for shipments to OECD countries. Exporters (called “hazardous secondary material generators” in the regulation) are also required to comply with annual reporting requirements.

The “export reclamation exclusion” may be of limited significance. On its face, it does not apply to the export of CRTs or SLABs. Further, any generator who could take advantage of the complex and detailed requirements of the export reclamation exclusion could more simply meet its RCRA obligations by complying with the relatively simple Subpart G or H requirements. Thus, the only “advantage” to a generator of using this exclusion is to avoid classifying its materials as a hazardous waste. Indeed, EPA apparently never attempted to document the consequence of this exclusion; in the economic analysis of the entire regulation, EPA never calculated any cost savings associated with the export reclamation

party manage the hazardous secondary material in a manner at least as environmentally protective as that employed for analogous raw materials.

224 EPA helpfully notes that “Canada and Mexico, though they are OECD Member countries, typically require written consent for exports to their countries.” Revisions to the Definition of Solid Waste, GovPulse, http://govpulse.us/entries/2008/10/30/E8-24399/revisions-to-the-definition-of-solid-waste (last visited Nov. 8, 2011).
225 Although not discussed by EPA, this disregard of its international hazardous waste obligations is consistent with EPA’s view that if the exemption from an international requirement is phrased as a “conditional exclusion,” the requirement does not apply. See Response to Comments Document, supra note 189, at 29.
227 Id.
228 40 C.F.R. § 261.4(a)(25)(x)–(xi).
229 See supra note 218 and accompanying text.
230 This is not a trivial consequence of the regulation and it may promote recycling, but this was not the apparent rationale for the exclusion.
exclusion. As of December 2010, no generator had taken advantage of this exclusion.

IV. THE OPERATION OF THE EPA REGULATORY REGIMES

Claims about the export of hazardous waste from the United States range from the benign to the apocalyptic. For some, the United States is exporting hazardous wastes of a type and in quantities that imperil the health and safety of poor citizens in less-developed countries. For others, there is simply no significant export of hazardous wastes from the United States except to Canada and Mexico. Both sides may be correct.

A. Reported Exports: What’s Going Where?

Information about the exports of materials under EPA’s export regimes is difficult to come by. As of December 2010, virtually no information was available from EPA on the Internet. Anecdotal information

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231 The Regulatory Impact Analysis prepared for the final set of reclamation exclusions states that it “does not separately estimate industry cost savings impacts for these two different types (i.e., offsite and export) of recycling exclusions for Exclusion 2. The generator export tonnages and generator exporter facility counts are embedded in the generator impacts for this exclusion, but not separately reported.” Mark Eads, Economist, U.S. Envtl. Prot. Agency & DPRA Inc., Regulatory Impact Analysis: USEPA’s 2008 Final Rule Amendments to the Industrial Recycling Exclusions of the RCRA Definition of Solid Waste 35 (2008) [hereinafter RIA]. The RIA also states that it “does not estimate the annual fraction (percentage) of affected hazardous secondary materials which may be exported for recycling. However, this is a baseline RCRA Subtitle C requirement (40 CFR 262.53 & 262.56) so no incremental cost impact is expected.” Id. at 181.

In other words, the RIA does not estimate the cost of notice and consent requirements of the exclusion since they would otherwise be applicable. It also does not document any cost savings attributable to the exclusion.


235 The only online export information that EPA provides involves exports to non-OECD countries. See Proposed Hazardous Waste Exports to Non-OECD Countries, U.S. ENVT. PROT. AGENCY, http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/hazard/international/non-oecd.htm (last modified Sept. 22, 2011). See infra note 448 and accompanying text for more commentary on public access to information.
has appeared in a variety of sources, including several reports of the Government Accountability Office regarding the export of CRTs.236

In response to a Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA") request, EPA provided information for this article regarding documents submitted under EPA export regulations. The information supplied by EPA included a summary of Notices of Intent received by EPA between 1995 and 2010 (Table 1), a summary of hazardous waste export data from annual exporter reports, including information on CRT exports (Table 2), and a summary of reported export notices for SLABs (Table 3).

This information confirms that, at least among persons that comply with EPA regulations, approximately ninety percent of exports, by number of Notices of Intent, numbers of shipments, and by tonnage, are going to Canada.237 The remaining exports are roughly divided between shipments to Mexico and all other OECD countries.238 By far the largest share, by “tonnage,” of shipments to OECD countries (other than Canada and Mexico) goes to the Republic of Korea.239 Information in an EPA summary of individual Notices of Intent does not indicate that any particular type of waste predominates: the waste codes include a number of listed wastes and wastes that exhibit all of the four hazard characteristics.240 The documents supplied in response to the FOIA request do not provide significant information regarding the means of disposal or recycling employed by the reported exports. Although this information must be included in the Notices of Intent submitted by exporters, neither the summary of Notices of Intent nor the Acknowledgments of Consent contain this information.

236 See Gov't Accountability Office, GAO-10-626, Electronic Waste: Considerations for Promoting Environmentally Sound Reuse and Recycling 9 (July 2010). The report states that “[a]s of March 2010, EPA reported 16 notifications, with acknowledgments of consent from the receiving country, for a company to export CRTs for recycling. . . . All 16 consents to export came from two importing countries—Canada and the Republic of Korea.” Id. at 9 n.6. The Report also states that EPA reported that 108 one-time notifications for export of used, unbroken CRTs for reuse (not recycling) as of May 2010. See id. In an earlier report, the GAO stated that “[a]s of June 2008, twenty-five countries have submitted forty-seven notices for export of CRTs for recycling to EPA. These companies informed EPA that they intended to responsibly recycle CRTs at facilities in Brazil, Canada, Korea, Malaysia and Mexico.” See August 2008 GAO Report, supra note 2, at 7 n.11.

237 See infra Table 1. Average exports to Canada were 1990 out of 2126, which is 93.6% of all exports.

238 EPA also provided Acknowledgments of Consent provided from the period 1/2/2010–7/29/2010. All of the 245 Acknowledgments of Consent involved shipments to Canada. Information available from author.

239 See infra Table 2.

240 See infra Tables 1, 2; Email from Eva Kreisler, U.S. Envtl. Prot. Agency, Office of Int'l Enforcement Compliance Div., to Jeffrey M. Gaba, Professor of Law, Dedman Sch. of Law (Dec. 7, 2010) (on file with author).
### Table 1: Summary of Notices of Intent*

**Waste Stream & Notices Workload by Calendar Year**

**Waste Streams (WS) / Notices**

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<td>3,834</td>
<td>4,065</td>
<td>31,885</td>
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| Total Notices | 856 | 861 | 1,156 | 1,465 | 746 | 696 | 542 | 478 | 446 | 423 | 302 | 325 | 489 | 543 | 615 | 9,621 | 641 |

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* Data as provided by EPA, see supra note 340

1. Because shipments under notices from Taiwan are not subject to the limit of one year (or other constraints) typical of bilateral agreements, notices are usually filed less often than annually.
2. Includes all OECD countries except Canada and Mexico, which have bilateral agreements with the United States.
## Exports

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### Cathode Ray Tube Exports

(Note: For CRT there is one WS per Notice)

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### Imports + Exports (Including CRT)—Combined Totals

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**TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF ANNUAL REPORTS**

Summary Hazardous Waste Export Data from OECA Annual Exporter Reports

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<td>Tons Shipped</td>
<td>No. of Exporters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals for Asia:</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>6,975</td>
</tr>
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<td>Europe:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
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<tr>
<td>France</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals for Europe:</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1,157</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>1,003</td>
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<tr>
<td>North America:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>28,191</td>
<td>330,407</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>78,059</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals for North America:</td>
<td>28,027</td>
<td>408,465</td>
<td>19,507</td>
<td>411,078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total U.S. exports:</td>
<td>29,092</td>
<td>409,623</td>
<td>19,907</td>
<td>419,057</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 1: Two entries from one exporter did not include any destination information, and so are not included in the summaries.

Note 2: Four entries from two exporters in this calendar year did not include any destination information, and so are not included in the summaries.

Note 3: Some exported amounts were reported in units other than tons. For amounts reported in liquid units (e.g., liters, gallons), a density equal to water was assumed to convert to tons. Specific conversion factors used are listed below.

** Data as provided by EPA, see supra note 240.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Exporters</th>
<th>No. of Shipments</th>
<th>Tons Shipped</th>
<th>No. of Exporters</th>
<th>No. of Shipments</th>
<th>Tons Shipped</th>
<th>No. of Exporters</th>
<th>No. of Shipments</th>
<th>Tons Shipped</th>
<th>No. of Exporters</th>
<th>No. of Shipments</th>
<th>Tons Shipped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>12,102</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,395</td>
<td>31,944</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>23,824</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>15,675</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>12,102</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,395</td>
<td>31,944</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>23,824</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>15,675</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>12,102</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,395</td>
<td>31,944</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1,150</td>
<td>23,824</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>15,675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note 3 (Continued):

CU-YDS to Liters 764.5549 1
Liters to Kg 0.01102 1.11E-06
Kg to TONS 3.785412 0.0005
TONS to Metric TON 1.102311 55
TONS to Grams 55
GRAMS to TONS 1.102311 55
Liters to GALS 1
GALS to TONS 3.785412 0.0005
Note 4: Total number of exporters is not additive, since a facility may export waste to more than one of the listed receiving countries.

Note 5: Table contains rounding error.
Limited data was also provided regarding the export of SLABs. The export of SLABs for recycling was not regulated until 2010, and therefore Notices of Intent have only been received for a portion of this year.\(^{241}\) The information indicates that Canada received by far the largest number of Notices of Intent involving exports, but that the second largest number involved shipments to Korea.\(^{242}\) Note that exporters sent two Notices of Intent for export to the non-OECD countries of Peru and the Philippines.\(^{243}\)

No information was available as to whether either country gave consent. Since both of these countries have ratified the Basel Convention,\(^{244}\) a decision to consent to these exports from the United States should violate their obligations under Basel.

Information was supplied on the export of CRTs, but this information is problematic. EPA’s conditional exclusion for CRTs became effective in January 2007,\(^{245}\) but, prior to this exclusion, waste CRTs exported for reclamation should have been subject to the Subpart E notice and consent requirements. It does not appear, however, that any of the Subpart E Notices of Intent summarized by EPA for the period 1995–2009 involved exports of CRTs. A 2008 GAO Report states that “as of June 2008,” forty-seven Notices of Intent to export CRTs had been submitted.\(^{246}\) In response to the FOIA request for this article, EPA provided information that shows

\(^{241}\) See supra notes 167–68 and accompanying text.
\(^{242}\) See supra Table 3.
\(^{243}\) See id.
\(^{244}\) Basel Convention’s Ratifications, supra note 3.
\(^{245}\) See supra notes 187–189 and accompanying text.
\(^{246}\) SEPTEMBER 2008 GAO REPORT, supra note 2, at 3 n.3, 10 n.9. These notices were for exports to Brazil, Canada, Korea, Malaysia, and Mexico. Id.
no Notices of Intent submitted for export of CRTs prior to 2009. The information for the year 2009 indicates that thirty-five Notices of Intent to export CRTs were submitted. 247 These included exports to non-OECD members including Costa Rica, Malaysia, and Indonesia. 248 These three countries have also ratified Basel, 249 but since they do not have an appropriate bilateral agreement on exports of hazardous waste from the United States, acceptance of the CRT shipments should also violate their obligations under Basel.

EPA promulgated its “reclamation exclusion” in 2008, but EPA has stated that it has not received any Notices of Intent under this provision. 250

B. Compliance with EPA Export Requirements: Are Exporters of RCRA-Regulated Materials Complying with EPA Regulations?

There are, for obvious reasons, little data on the amounts of hazardous waste that are being exported in violation of EPA export requirements. 251 The U.S. hazardous waste system, both domestic and international, essentially relies on self-reporting: generators are responsible for determining whether their material meets the definition of hazardous waste and is subject to export controls. 252

In a series of reports, the Government Accountability Office (“GAO”) has been critical of EPA enforcement efforts with respect to exports of

247 See supra Table 1.
248 The United States has bilateral agreements authorizing imports of hazardous waste from Malaysia and the Philippines. See REGULATIONS GOVERNING HAZARDOUS WASTE GENERATORS, supra note 9, at III-49. EPA has no agreements authorizing the exports of hazardous waste to any non-OECD country.
249 Basel Convention’s Ratifications, supra note 3.
251 As one knowledgeable observer stated:

It is difficult to estimate accurately the amount of such unreported exports because some exporters may give notice of intent to export but ultimately decide not to export; however, some estimates indicate that waste export trade is as much as eight times more than reported, not including smugglers who elude customs.

F. James Handley, Hazardous Waste Exports: A Leak in the System of International Legal Controls, [1989] 19 ENVTL. L. REP. (ENVTL. L. INST.) 10,171, 10,174–75. “According to one EPA official, ‘many exporters don’t bother to give notice because there isn’t any enforcement.’” Id. at 10,175.
252 See 40 C.F.R. § 262.11 (2010).
CRTs. The GAO found EPA’s enforcement “lacking” and reported that EPA had no plans to develop any enforcement strategies to assure compliance. The Director of EPA’s Waste and Chemical Enforcement Division was quoted as stating that inspections to determine compliance with environmental laws are “labor intensive,” and EPA has stated that it largely relies on “tips and complaints” to identify violations of the CRT regulations. Although improved coordination with Customs and Border Control agents has been suggested, improved enforcement of EPA’s existing requirements through government inspection does seem Sisyphusian.

The most significant problem is how to identify hazardous wastes subject to RCRA export requirements that are destined for non-OECD countries. The GAO identified considerable concern with the potential illegal export of CRTs to non-OECD Asian countries, including China and India. It was GAO efforts that led to EPA’s only prosecution for violation of regulations for an export to Hong Kong. Unless it is clear that particular types of materials, such as SLABs, are subject to EPA export controls, it remains difficult, if not impossible, to effectively police exports at the border.

Additionally, enforcement can be difficult since classification as a hazardous waste may depend on the intended use in the receiving country. A “secondary material” that is being reused in not a solid; the same material if recycled is a solid waste. This is particularly an issue with used CRTs. If CRTs are exported for reuse they are not subject to notice and

254 SEPTEMBER 2008 GAO REPORT, supra note 2, at cover page, 12–14.
255 Id. at 14.
256 AUGUST 2008 GAO REPORT, supra note 2, at 29.
257 Id.
258 SEPTEMBER 2008 GAO REPORT, supra note 2, at cover page.
259 The GAO engaged in “sting” operations to identify persons willing to export CRTs in apparent violation of EPA regulations. AUGUST 2008 GAO REPORT, supra note 2, at 23–24.
260 See id. at cover page.
262 See 40 C.F.R. § 261.2(a), (c) (2010).
consent requirements; if they are exported for recycling they are. At the point of export, however, there is no way of identifying whether or not a CRT is being exported for recycling. To address the enforcement problem raised by this situation, EPA subjects exporters of used CRTs exported for reuse to submit a one-time notice to allow enforcers to “verify” that the CRTs are exported for reuse.

C. Are E-Wastes Being Properly Identified as Hazardous Wastes?

Much of the concern on exports of hazardous waste has focused on the export of electronic “e-wastes” for recycling to non-OECD countries, including China. EPA’s regulations directly address the issue of e-wastes through two provisions. First, through the “conditional exclusion” of CRTs, EPA has imposed notice and consent requirements on the export of used CRTs for recycling. Second, EPA has excluded the export of printed circuit boards from export controls. Any other hazardous e-wastes, including computers, keyboards, cell phones, even computer “mouses,” should be subject to the Subpart E or H export requirements.

EPA has, however, done a remarkably poor job in clarifying the hazardous waste status of most other e-wastes. This involves two questions. When is used electronic equipment considered to be “solid waste”? What e-waste is classified as a “hazardous” solid waste?

EPA has established policies that give some guidance on when used electronic equipment will be classified as a “solid waste.” In general, it appears that electronic equipment sent for “reuse” is not a waste; e-waste

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263 See supra notes 182–84 and accompanying text.
264 EPA describes its rationale as follows:
   The Agency notes that intact CRTs exported for reuse are identical in appearance to those exported for recycling. Consequently, to help ensure that the intact CRTs are actually reused abroad, we are requiring persons who export used, intact CRTs for reuse to submit a one-time notification to the Regional Administrator with contact information and a statement that the notifier plans to export used, intact CRTs for reuse. These notifications will allow regulatory authorities to contact the notifier, when appropriate, to ask for verification that the CRTs are exported for reuse instead of recycling or disposal.

265 See supra note 187 and accompanying text.
266 See supra notes 203–09 and accompanying text.
sent for recycling or disposal would be a waste. This, of course, creates the problem that identifying exported electronic equipment as e-wastes requires a determination of whether they are being exported for reuse or recycling. For used computers, there may be no obvious visual means to determine their intended future use.

The other major problem is determining whether e-wastes constitute “hazardous wastes.” No e-waste is a “listed” hazardous waste; e-wastes would be hazardous only if they exhibit a hazard characteristic. EPA apparently has taken the position that no e-waste, other than CRTs and circuit boards, exhibits a hazard characteristic. In 2008 GAO reported that “EPA has stated repeatedly, however, that to its knowledge, other types of electronic equipment do not fail its threshold toxicity test and are thus are not currently regulated.”

EPA’s statement is baffling. The basis for EPA’s conclusion that CRTs exhibit the toxicity characteristic is data from certain studies contained in the administrative record for the CRT rule. These studies themselves indicate that a wide variety of electronic components, in addition to

267 In the preamble to its CRT conditional exclusion, EPA described its position on determining the waste status of other electronic materials. It stated:

With respect to non-CRT electronic materials, the Agency uses the same line of reasoning that is outlined above for CRTs to determine that the materials are not solid wastes if they are reused or only require repair and are not sent for processing or reclamation. That is, if an original user sends electronic materials to a reseller because he lacks the specialized knowledge needed to determine whether the units can be reused as products, the original user is not a RCRA generator. The materials are not considered solid wastes until a decision is made to recycle them in other ways or dispose of them.


268 See AUGUST 2008 GAO REPORT, supra note 2, at 2 n.2. In the preamble to its CRT conditional exclusion proposal, EPA wrote that it “is studying certain non-CRT electronic materials to determine whether they consistently exhibit a characteristic of hazardous waste. However, we are not currently aware of any non-CRT computer components or electronic products that would generally be hazardous wastes.” Hazardous Waste Management System; Modification of the Hazardous Waste Program; Cathode Ray Tubes and Mercury-Containing Equipment, 67 Fed. Reg. 40,508, 40,512 (proposed June 12, 2002).

CRTs, may exhibit the toxicity characteristic for lead. Indeed, there is as much information to indicate that e-wastes, including whole computers, computer keyboards, and cell phones, can exhibit the same toxicity characteristic as CRTs. Yet EPA appears to assume that CRTs are the only e-wastes that would be subject to existing export controls.

Thus, back to compliance issues. EPA regulations place the responsibility on the generator to determine whether a solid waste exhibits a hazardous characteristic. Exporters should not be able to violate requirements for hazardous waste exports because they are uncertain about the status of their wastes. Since there is reason to believe that much of the electronic waste, other than CRTs, being exported for recycling is subject to EPA export requirements, this is a compliance issue that EPA must address through regulation, guidance, and enforcement policies.

V. EPA’s Authority to Regulate the Exports of Hazardous Waste

Whatever the merits (or demerits) of EPA’s implementation of its existing export regulations, there are significant questions about the scope of EPA’s legal authority to regulate exports. Perhaps the most significant questions relate to the effect of international agreements on EPA’s authority to regulate the export of hazardous waste. There are also questions as to whether EPA has authority to regulate exports more stringently than it now does.

A. What is the Effect of International Agreements on EPA’s Authority to Regulate the Export of Hazardous Waste?

EPA clearly has authority to regulate the export of hazardous wastes. Section 3017(a)(1) establishes a requirement that exporters

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270 Id. at 4-1.
272 These hazardous e-wastes would not be subject to the “scrap metal” exclusion which applies to whole circuit boards nor to the “shredded circuit board” conditional exclusion. See supra notes 203–209 and accompanying text. E-wastes might not be subject to export controls if generated as excluded “household hazardous waste” or if generated by “conditional exempt small quantity generators.” If commingled with other hazardous wastes, even these e-wastes would be subject to universal waste export rules. See supra notes 203–09 and accompanying text.
274 See infra notes 437–47 and accompanying text.
comply with a congressionally defined “base” notice and consent regime, and section 3017(b) delegates authority to EPA to promulgate domestic regulations to implement these requirements.\footnote{RCRA § 3017(a)(1), (b) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(a)(1), (b) (2006)). Section 3017(b) specifically requires EPA to promulgate regulations “necessary to implement this section.” \textit{Id.} at § 3017(b) (codified as amended as 42 U.S.C. § 6938(b) (2006)). Additionally, section 2002(a)(1) grants the Administrator the authority to adopt “such regulations as are necessary to carry out his functions” under RCRA. \textit{Id.} § 2002(a)(1) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6912(a)(1) (2006)).} EPA regulations that apply to countries with which the United States has no export agreements fall exclusively under the authority of this base program.\footnote{See supra note 36 and accompanying text. Notice that EPA’s regulations do not fall under “treaty based” or “non-treaty based” authority. The Subpart H regulations apply to exports subject to the OECD Decision. See supra note 112 and accompanying text. The Subpart E regulations, however, apply not only to all exports of hazardous waste not subject to international agreements, but also to all exports to Canada and Mexico governed by the bilateral treaties. \textit{See supra} notes 84–87 and accompanying text.}

But section 3017 does more than require compliance with a congressionally defined set of notice and consent requirements; in those cases where the United States has entered into an international agreement, section 3017(a)(2) requires that exports “conform” to that agreement rather than the base program.\footnote{RCRA § 3017(a)(2) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(a)(2) (2006)). The requirement to conform to an international agreement operates in lieu of the base program. \textit{See supra} note 37. In addition to defining the requirements of Subtitle C to require that exports conform to an international agreement, Congress has also expressly made it a separate crime to export in a manner that is not “in conformance” with an applicable international agreement. RCRA § 3008(d)(6) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6928(d)(6) (2006)).} EPA has also been delegated authority to adopt regulations implementing the requirements of an applicable international agreement.\footnote{Section 3017(b) requires EPA to adopt regulations “to implement this section,” and this presumably extends to a requirement to promulgate regulations governing the prohibition in section 3017(a)(2) on exports unless “in conformance” with appropriate international agreements. RCRA § 3017(a)(2), (b) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(a)(2), (b) (2006)).} Section 3017 thus apparently both requires compliance with international agreements and confers authority on EPA to adopt regulations implementing these agreements.

If section 3017 purported to implement international agreements in existence at the time of its adoption, there would be little doubt that this would be an appropriate mechanism by which Congress could ensure that such agreements were given domestic effect.\footnote{See infra note 298 and accompanying text.} Section 3017 was, however, adopted as part of the Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments of 1984.\footnote{RCRA § 3017 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938 (2006)).}
and in 1984 there were no applicable international agreements in existence. Thus, through section 3017(a)(2) Congress purported to “incorporate by reference” the requirements of future international agreements.281

Congress’s apparent attempt to incorporate future international agreements raises a series of questions:

- Do the bilateral agreements with Canada and Mexico or the OECD Decision create domestic legal obligations in the absence of additional implementing legislation or regulations?
- Do these international agreements provide authority to EPA to adopt implementing regulations that would otherwise not be authorized under RCRA in the absence of the agreements?
- Do these agreements require EPA to exercise its otherwise existing authority to implement their requirements?
- If the Basel Convention were ratified, could EPA implement its requirements without additional statutory authority?

These questions involve serious, and largely unresolved, issues of constitutional, administrative, and international law. The answers to these questions have both substantive and procedural implications for EPA’s regulatory authority to implement a program for the control of exports of hazardous waste.

1. The Legal Effect of the Bilateral Agreements with Canada and Mexico

The nature of the agreements between the United States and Canada and the United States and Mexico raise a threshold issue about their domestic effect. The Constitution provides that “all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land, and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby,”282 and, under the Constitution, treaties require ratification by a vote of two-thirds of the Senate.283 Neither the Mexico nor

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282 U.S. CONST. art. VI, cl. 2.
283 Id. art II, § 2.
Canada agreements are “treaties”; neither was ratified by the Senate; indeed, both agreements were executed, “on behalf of the Government of the United States,” by the Administrator of the EPA. Both, however, purport to create binding obligations between the countries.

The Mexico and Canada Agreements would be classified as “international executive agreements.” International executive agreements of this sort do not have an express constitutional status, but there is wide consensus that they have the status, at least within the realm of international law, of “treaties” that have been ratified pursuant to the constitutional mechanism of Senate ratification. Such is the view of the Department of State, and there is authority that such agreements can preempt state law requirements and govern private claims against foreign governments.
Certainly international executive agreements, entered into without Senate ratification as a treaty, have been given domestic effect when implemented by adoption of implementing legislation.288 Notwithstanding a rather “black letter” view that international agreements have the status of treaties, the full scope of the domestic effects of an international executive agreement remains uncertain.289

For our purposes, however, assuming that the Canada and Mexico Agreements have the same domestic status as treaties, the question remains as to whether they directly apply to private parties or confer additional domestic authority on EPA.

As a matter of international law, treaties create obligations between governments, but it is an established element of U.S. constitutional law that treaties are effective as federal law and may create domestic obligations.290 This domestic effect can arise in two ways. First, treaties may be “self-executing” and create enforceable obligations without other implementing authority.291 Determination of whether a treaty is to be construed as “self-executing” and therefore immediately effective as a matter of domestic law involves a question of interpretation based on the language of the treaty and the intention of the parties.292 As one court put it, “[t]he self-execution question is perhaps one of the most confounding in treaty law.”293 Even if construed as “self-executing,” the Supreme Court has stated that there

324 (1937) (recognizing legitimacy of an international executive agreement through which the United States resolved claims with the Soviet Union); see also Kuchenbecker, supra note 286, at 13 (describing the evolution of the position of the Department of State on the status of international executive agreements).

288 The North American Free Trade Agreement (“NAFTA”), for example, was negotiated and executed by the President and approved by legislation, not Senate ratification. See Bruce Ackerman & David Golove, Is NAFTA Constitutional?, 108 Harv. L. Rev. 799, 802–03 (1995).

289 Restatement (Third) of Foreign Relations Law, supra note 285, § 303 confines pure executive agreements to areas that fall directly within the President’s independent constitutional power. Courts have upheld the legitimacy of international executive agreements in areas, such as negotiation of claims between governments, that seem to fall within the President’s authority to conduct foreign affairs. See id.

290 U.S. Const. art. VI. Article VI provides that treaties made under the authority of the United States are “the supreme Law of the Land.” Id.; see Medellin v. Texas, 552 U.S. 491 (2008); Foster v. Neilson, 27 U.S. (2 Pet.) 253, 314 (1829); see also Restatement (Third) of Foreign Relations Law, supra note 285, § 111.

291 See Medellin, 552 U.S. at 504–05.

292 See United States v. Postal, 589 F.2d 862 (5th Cir. 1979); Restatement (Second) Foreign Relations Law of the United States § 154 (1965).

293 Postal, 589 F.2d at 876.
is a “background presumption” that treaties do not create private enforceable rights.294

The second basis by which treaties may gain domestic legal effect is through adoption of domestic legislation conferring authority to implement the treaty.295 Although a treaty can become effective through Presidential agreement and consent by two-thirds of the Senate,296 any domestic implementing legislation would be subject to the full domestic law-making process including bicameral agreement of both chambers of Congress and presentment to the President.297 In Missouri v. Holland, for example, the Court considered the scope of constitutional authority to enter a treaty governing protection of migratory birds, but the treaty itself was given domestic effect through federal legislation specifically implementing its requirements.298

Thus, an immediate question arises as to whether the Canada or Mexico Agreements are “self-executing.” If self-executing, there would be little doubt that EPA would have the authority to implement their requirements through regulations. It is, however, unlikely that these agreements could be construed as “self-executing” based on their own terms and the understanding of the parties. Neither agreement expressly provides that it is to be self-executing; both agreements refer to subsequent adoption of domestic legislation or enforcement through domestic laws or regulations.

294 Medellin, 552 U.S. at 506 n.3.
296 U.S. Const. art. II, § 2, cl. 2.
297 See Medellin, 552 U.S. 491.
299 The Canada/U.S. Agreement directs its obligations to the actions of the governments and provides that

[...]

to the extent any implementing regulations are necessary to comply with this Agreement, the Parties will act expeditiously to issue such regulations consistent with domestic law. Pending such issuance, the Parties will make best efforts to provide notification in accordance with this Agreement where current regulatory authority is insufficient. The Parties will provide each other with a diplomatic note upon the issuance and the coming into effect of any such regulations.

Canada/U.S. Agreement, supra note 49, at art. 5.3. Canada and the United States amended the Agreement in 1992 to apply to municipal solid waste, but the United States apparently has taken the position that this amendment cannot be implemented without subsequent domestic legislation. See infra note 300. The Mexico/U.S. Agreement provides that “[e]ach Party shall ensure, to the extent practicable, that its domestic laws and regulations are enforced with respect to transboundary shipments of hazardous waste.” Mexico/U.S. Agreement, supra note 55, at art. II.2. The Agreement also imposes liability for exports in violation of the Agreement, but provides that this is to be enforced “when applicable...
It is the United States position, for example, that the provisions of the Canada/U.S. Agreement addressing “municipal solid waste” cannot be implemented without additional legislative action. If not “self-executing,” the agreements themselves would, thus, not create enforceable obligations on exporters. As significantly, if not self-executing, the agreements would not themselves confer authority on EPA to adopt implementing regulations not otherwise authorized by RCRA.

If these agreements are not self-executing, what is the effect of the provisions of section 3017 that require exports to “conform” to future agreements? On the one hand, the provisions of section 3017(a)(2) may simply require EPA to exercise its existing “base” authority to establish regulations that conform to the requirements of any future agreements. In this view, section 3017(a)(2) does not broaden EPA’s authority nor establish obligations on exporters. It is simply a directive to EPA on how it should use its existing authority.

But there are serious problems with this construction. First, section 3017 purports affirmatively to prohibit exports that do not conform to international agreements and section 3008(d)(6) makes such action a crime. Thus, the language of RCRA does more than direct EPA to implement regulations, the violation of which would constitute a civil or criminal violation; it directly imposes requirements and sanctions based on compliance with the agreements themselves. Second, if section 3017(a)(2) merely directed EPA to exercise its existing authority to implement international agreements, then the language would be superfluous. Any properly executed international agreements would, at a minimum, require the U.S. government to exercise its existing authority to implement their requirements.

The other possible reading is that section 3017 gives future international agreements immediate domestic effect and confers authority on EPA to implement their requirements. Thus, EPA could adopt regulations implementing the specific requirements of the Mexico and Canada Agreements in accordance with its national laws and regulations.”

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302 RCRA §§ 3008(d)(6), 3017 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 6928(d)(6), 6938 (2006)).
based on section 3017(a)(2) and section 3017(b). That is the most straightforward reading of the language. Congress has not equivocated; compliance with future international agreements is an obligation under RCRA and EPA must implement those obligations through its regulations. 303

But there are serious constitutional problems in construing section 3017 to confer domestic effect on the Mexico and Canada agreements. As noted, section 3017 was adopted as part of the Hazardous and Solid Waste Amendments of 1984, two years before the United States entered the Mexico and Canada Agreements. 304 To construe section 3017 to confer domestic effect on these (otherwise non-self-executing) agreements would mean that they have been given domestic effect without having gone through the full domestic law-making process. In other words, an earlier Congress will have delegated authority to the Executive (or to the Executive and the Senate in the case of formal Treaties) to make future domestically binding agreements without going through the constitutional legislative process.

The Supreme Court’s formalistic treatment of the constitutional requirements for adoption of legislation suggests that such a construction of section 3017(a) would be unconstitutional. In decisions beginning with Immigration and Nationalization Service v. Chadha, the Supreme Court has rejected the authority of Congress to create mechanisms, such as legislative vetoes or line-item vetoes, that produce binding legislative decisions without satisfying the constitutional requirements of bicameral concurrence and presentment to the President necessary for the adoption of legislation. 305 Construing section 3017(a) to incorporate subsequently enacted international agreements would thus endow these subsequent agreements with legislative effect without satisfying these formal requirements. 306

306 This problem is not avoided by Congress having adopted the mechanism in a properly enacted legislation. The legislative veto provision at issue in Chadha had been adopted
Thus, there are strong reasons to question whether section 3017 of RCRA can give domestic legislative effect to international agreements not specifically contemplated by Congress when section 3017(a) was adopted. Construing section 3017 to confer authority on EPA to adopt regulations to implement a future, non-self-executing agreement would most starkly raise the constitutional issue of whether Congress can confer domestic rule-making authority to implement a treaty subsequently negotiated by the President and ratified by the Senate. The issue is perplexing and not yet resolved by the Supreme Court.

The analogy to the Supreme Court’s treatment of legislative vetoes and line-item vetoes is not, however, perfect. Treaties and other international agreements stand on a different constitutional basis than legislation, and there is no doubt that the President and Senate, through ratification of a “self-executing” treaty, can create binding domestic obligations. There is also little doubt that at least some class of international “executive agreements” can have binding domestic effect without implementation through domestic legislation. Thus, the constitutional requirements of bicameralism and presentment are not required to make binding domestic law when the law arises through international agreement. Thus, if subsequent agreements, such as the Mexico and Canada Agreements, stand on the same constitutional footing as formal treaties and were construed as self-executing, the constitutional problems would be avoided.

But this raises a new issue: are the actions of a prior Congress relevant in construing a subsequent international agreement as self-executing? In other words, can section 3017 avoid constitutional problems by construing the provision, not independently to give international agreements domestic effect, but rather to serve as a basis for construing future agreements as self-executing? It seems unlikely that courts would use a provision adopted by Congress in 1984 as a basis for interpreting a subsequent treaty as self-executing. As “confounding” as the “self-executing” construction question may be, the interpretations in treaties on this issue generally focus on factors contemporaneous with ratification of the treaties and not on the actions of Congress taken decades before. If the future agreements are not themselves construed as self-executing (and thus enforceable in legislation that had been enacted with bicameral adoption and presentment to the President. See Chadha, 462 U.S. 919. The Supreme Court rejected the proposition that “initial statutory authorizations” would not shield a subsequent legislative act taken without compliance with constitutional requirements. See id. at 987 (Court rejects contrary position of Justice White in dissent).

307 See supra note 286 and accompanying text.
without the need for subsequent regulations), we are back to the fundamental question of whether section 3017 can be read to confer authority on EPA to adopt regulations implementing new agreements.

The uncertainty about whether the Canada and Mexico treaties are directly enforceable under RCRA or whether, through section 3017(a)(1) and section 3017(b), they create new authority for EPA to adopt domestic regulations is certainly interesting, but hardly crucial. The terms of these agreements largely mirror the requirements of the base congressionally mandated notice and consent regime under section 3017(a)(1) that EPA clearly has the authority to impose. In other words, EPA need not rely on the agreements to justify adoption of the enforceable Subpart E regulations that govern exports to Mexico and Canada. Indeed, EPA cannot have relied on their authority; the general Subpart E requirements that apply to the export of wastes to these countries were promulgated before the agreements were made and the same Subpart E requirements apply to exports to countries with which the United States has no international agreements.

Which is not to say that there are not several interesting questions that arise if the bilateral agreements create obligations that EPA is required to implement. The EPA regulations governing exports to Canada, for example, do not appear to be fully consistent with the requirements of the Canada/U.S. Agreement. This agreement, for example, expressly provides for “tacit consent”; if Canada has not responded to a Notice of Intent within thirty days of receipt of the notice, then consent is automatically presumed. The Subpart E regulations that govern exports to Canada do

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308 The more significant question, discussed below, is whether section 3017 confers authority on EPA to implement future international agreements, such as the Basel Convention, without the need for additional implementing legislation. See infra notes 338–364 and accompanying text.

309 The Subpart E regulations were promulgated in 1986, and nowhere in the preambles either to the proposed or final regulations does EPA refer to those or any treaties. Hazardous Waste Management System: Exports of Hazardous Waste, 51 Fed. Reg. 28,664 (Aug. 8, 1986). Nor does EPA expressly cite treaties as a basis for its legal authority to adopt the Subpart E regulations. The preamble to the final 1986 Subpart E regulations, for example, states:

| These regulations are being promulgated under the authority of sections 2002(a), 3002, 3003, 3006, 3007, 3008 and 3017 of the Solid Waste Disposal Act, as amended by the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, as amended, 42 U.S.C. 6912(a), 6922, 6923, 6926, 6927, and 6937. |

Id. As discussed below, this statement is, however, ambiguous since it is possible that section 3017 could be construed as a source of authority to implement requirements of international agreements.

310 Canada/U.S. Agreement, supra note 49, at art. 3(d).
not allow for the export of waste based on such tacit consent. Any breach of the Agreement would presumably be “enforceable” only by the government of Canada against the government of the United States. An additional, and problematic, question is whether section 3017 gives private parties a cause of action under RCRA’s judicial review provisions to challenge the actions of the administrator in adopting regulations that do not comply with the terms of an international agreement. This issue is specifically addressed below with respect to implementation of a decision of the OECD.

2. The Legal Effect of the OECD Decision

The issues of EPA’s obligation and authority to implement the OECD Decision are different, and in many ways more complex, than those arising from implementation of treaties and other international executive agreements. The OECD was created by a 1960 Convention ratified by the Senate in 1961.311 The terms of the OECD Convention expressly provide that the OECD can “take decisions which, except as otherwise provided, shall be binding on all the Members.”312 The Convention further provides, however, that “[n]o decision shall be binding on any Member until it has complied with the requirements of its own constitutional procedures.”313

At the time of ratification of the OECD Convention, the United States position on the significance of OECD decisions on United States authority was expressly addressed as part of the Senate ratification process.314 The Senate ratification document states it was ratified “with the interpretation and explanation of the intent of the Senate that nothing in the convention . . . confers any power on the Executive to bind the United States in substantive matters beyond what the Executive now has, or to bind the United States without compliance with applicable procedures imposed by domestic law.”315 Thus, contemporaneous material indicates that

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312 Id. at art. 5(a).
313 Id. at art. 6.3.
315 Convention on the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, supra note 311, at 1751:
WHEREAS the Senate of the United States of America by their resolution of March 16, 1961, two-thirds of the Senators present concurring therein, did advise and consent to the ratification of the said Convention and the two protocols relating thereto “with the interpretation and
the United States never intended, by ratification of the OECD Convention itself, to give subsequent OECD Decisions the power to confer authority not otherwise authorized by domestic statute.

Additionally, there are reasons to doubt that the OECD Decision obligates EPA to adopt regulations, even if otherwise within EPA’s authority, that are necessary to implement the OECD Decision. The effect of such an obligation would be to delegate to an international authority the power to impose requirements of domestic agencies. Although there is growing debate about the constitutionality of a delegation of authority to international organizations to impose binding obligations on the United States, there is limited case law. In Medellin v. Texas, the United States Supreme Court rejected an argument that a judgment of the International Court of Justice (“ICJ”), issued under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, created federal obligations that were binding on state courts. The Supreme Court concluded that neither the terms of the Convention itself nor a Presidential memorandum that purported to implement the Convention provided that decisions of the ICJ would have domestic effect on state proceedings. Medellin, however, dealt with the specific terms of the Vienna Convention and with the effect of an ICJ judgment arising from an international adjudication; it is of limited guidance in evaluating the effect of an international “regulatory” decision taken pursuant to a treaty.

This issue was, however, directly addressed by the D.C. Circuit in NRDC v. EPA, and the case strongly suggests that the OECD Decision does not impose binding obligations on EPA. NRDC v. EPA dealt with the scope of domestic obligations arising under the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. The Senate had ratified the Protocol in 1988 and Congress had specifically incorporated it into domestic

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318 Id. at 498–99.


320 See generally id.
law through amendments to the Clean Air Act. Under the Protocol, the United States and other parties agreed to phase out the production and use of certain ozone depleting chemicals, and pursuant to the Protocol, the parties subsequently adopted “decisions” that specified the requirements for the phaseout of methyl bromide, an ozone-depleting chemical subject to the Protocol. EPA subsequently promulgated domestic regulations that purported to implement these decisions. NRDC sought judicial review of the regulations, claiming that EPA had failed to implement the requirements of the decisions. Its legal argument was simple: the Protocol, implemented through domestic legislation, created binding domestic obligations; the Protocol authorized the Parties subsequently to impose binding obligations through its “decisions”; therefore, the decisions adopted pursuant to the terms of the Protocol imposed domestically enforceable requirements on EPA.

The court stated that the issue of the domestic effect, not of a treaty, but of the decision of an international organization was one of first impression, and it characterized the implications of this issue as follows:

NRDC’s interpretation raises significant constitutional problems. If the “decisions” are “law”—enforceable in federal court like statutes or legislative rules—then Congress either has delegated lawmaking authority to an international body or authorized amendments to a treaty without presidential signature or Senate ratification, in violation of Article II of the Constitution.

Rather than confront the constitutionality of the position, the court stated that it was “far more plausible to interpret the Clean Air Act and

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321 42 U.S.C. § 7671c(h); 464 F.3d at 2. This section requires EPA to phase out production of methyl chloride on a schedule “that is in accordance with, but not more stringent than, the phaseout schedule of the Montreal Protocol Treaty as in effect on October 21, 1998.” 42 U.S.C. § 7671c(h). Note that this statutory provision does not purport to implement future phaseout schedules negotiated by the parties.
322 464 F.3d at 2.
323 Pursuant to the Protocol, the parties adopted Decision IX/6 that established guidelines for determining the phaseout of methyl bromide and Decision Ex. I/3 that provided specific requirements for production of methyl bromide relating to the “critical use” provisions of the Protocol. Protection of Stratospheric Ozone: Process for Exempting Critical Uses From the Phaseout of Methyl Bromide, 69 Fed. Reg. 76,982 (Dec. 23, 2004). EPA promulgated regulations purporting to implement these Decisions. Id.
324 464 F.3d at 5.
325 Id. at 8.
326 Id.
Montreal Protocol as creating an ongoing international political commitment rather than a delegation of lawmaking authority to annual meetings of the Parties.”

Whatever the implications of creating a “political commitment,” the court was clear that the decisions did not create enforceable domestic obligations on EPA. Although it did not resolve the issue, the court strongly suggested that it would be unconstitutional for a treaty (and its subsequent domestic implementing legislation) to confer authority on an international organization to adopt subsequent binding obligations with domestic effect.

There are a number of implications that arise if the OECD Decision neither creates a binding obligation on EPA to adopt regulations consistent with its terms nor confers additional rule-making authority on EPA. First, EPA relied on the “binding” effect of the OECD Decision to avoid providing an opportunity for public comment on its original Subpart H regulations. Under the Administrative Procedure Act, agencies must provide notice and an opportunity for public comment on proposed regulations unless “good cause” exists to forgo the comment period. EPA explained that “good cause” existed in part because the Subpart H regulations merely codified the “binding” requirements of the OECD Decision. It likened the promulgation of the Subpart H regulations to simple regulatory codification of statutory provisions. If EPA’s action in promulgating export requirements addressed by the OECD Decision is not simply ministerial codification of otherwise binding requirements, then its good cause rationale for avoiding notice and comment is, at the least, suspect.

327 Id. at 9.
328 Id.
329 Further, the court rejected the argument that the decisions of the parties were simply interpreting ambiguous, but otherwise applicable, treaty provisions. The court expressly stated that the decisions, rather than interpreting ambiguous treaty terms, were filling “treaty gaps.” 464 F.3d at 9. Thus, the court did not reach the issue of whether treaty terms themselves, rather than subsequently adopted “regulations,” could create enforceable obligations on the EPA.
333 In EPA’s view, promulgation of the Subpart H regulations implemented a binding OECD Decision and was “analogous to a codification of statutory requirements, in which an agency assumes the ministerial, nondiscretionary functions of translating requirements to regulatory form.” Id.
334 EPA did provide other reasons for invoking the good cause exception, including the need for international consistency and the need for regulations that would allow other OECD countries to trade with the United States in conformance with the Basel Convention. Id.
Second, if the OECD Decision does not provide additional authority to implement its requirements, EPA’s Subpart H regulations must be based on authority generally available under RCRA. In other words, if EPA has adopted more stringent requirements under Subpart H than those adopted under Subpart E, those different, and more stringent, requirements must be justified by more than a reference to the OECD Decision; they must be requirements that are otherwise justified under RCRA.

EPA has, in fact, imposed requirements under Subpart H that are not required under Subpart E. These include, among others:

- tacit consent,
- a requirement that transit countries consent to the shipment,
- a requirement that any alternative disposal facilities employ “environmentally sound management,” and
- a contractual obligation between the exporter and the receiving facility.

If these requirements can be justified under existing RCRA authority, then EPA may have the authority to impose more stringent regulations (at least regulations consistent with the Subpart H regulations) on the export of wastes to non-OECD countries. In other words, if EPA can justify

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335 In the preamble to its original 1996 Subpart H regulation, EPA stated that authority to promulgate the regulations arose under sections 2002(a) and 3017(a)(2) and (f) of RCRA. Id. It also stated that “EPA has determined that no statutory change to the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) is needed because RCRA currently authorizes EPA to promulgate rules governing imports and exports of hazardous waste, and contains adequate authority to promulgate the requirements of the Decision.” Id. EPA’s statements, however, suggest that it was relying on a claim of unique authority to implement an international agreement, rather than general authority to implement the set of base notice and consent requirements, as the basis for the Subpart H regulations. In its preamble to the 2010 revisions to the Subpart H regulations, EPA somewhat more expansively, but still ambiguously, stated that the regulations were promulgated under authority “found in sections 1006, 2002(a), 3001–3010, 3013, and 3017” of RCRA. Revisions to the Requirements for Transboundary Shipments of Hazardous Wastes Between OECD Member Countries, 75 Fed. Reg. 1236, 1238 (Jan. 8, 2010).


“take-back” and “environmentally sound management” requirements for OECD exports, it should be able to justify such a requirement for exports to non-OECD counties. This has implications, among other things, on EPA’s ability to a single set of export regulations and to implement the requirements of the Basel Convention without additional statutory authority.

3. Could EPA Implement a Ratified Basel Convention?

The United States has signed and the Senate has consented to ratification of the Basel Convention on Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes.338 The United States has not, however, submitted documentation to the Secretariat of the Basel Convention, and therefore the United States has not, as a matter of international law, ratified Basel.339 As a non-ratifying party, the export of hazardous wastes to virtually all other countries is prohibited under Basel to all countries other than the OECD countries with whom we have an appropriate international agreement.340

The reason that the United States has not ratified Basel is the universal assumption that the requirements of Basel could not be implemented unless Congress enacted legislation granting EPA additional authority.341 In testimony to Congress, the Administrator of EPA and the Assistant Secretary of State for Environment stated that the United States could not ratify the Basel Convention until Congress had adopted amendments to RCRA that conferred authority on EPA to implement the Convention.342 In the early 1990s, a number of bills were actually introduced in Congress that would have provided additional statutory authority to regulate the export of hazardous wastes; however, they had little promise.343

A number of perceived inadequacies in existing RCRA authority to implement Basel have been identified. In testimony to Congress, then EPA Administrator William Reilly identified a number of Basel requirements

339 See Basel, supra note 3, at art. 22; SEPTEMBER 2008 GAO REPORT, supra note 2, at 15 n.12.
340 See supra notes 78–81 and accompanying text.
342 Hearings on Envtl. Prot., testimony of W. Reilly, supra note 5.
343 See Johnson, supra note 341, at 318–320.
that EPA did not have authority to implement. In the Administrator’s words:

We do not have authority to control municipal solid waste; we do not have a notice and consent requirement with respect to exports of our hazardous wastes; and we don’t have any authority to recover the cost of any waste that we are obligated to have returned to the United States once we learn that it has been disposed of inappropriately in an unsound manner abroad. Those are all requirements of the convention and therefore, the implementing legislation is necessary to fulfill its terms.344

Other potential deficiencies in existing RCRA authority include the inability to prohibit the export of hazardous waste if the waste will not be managed in an “environmentally sound” manner,345 and the inability to prohibit the export of hazardous wastes to countries that are not a party to Basel or with which we have entered into an appropriate international agreement.346

Could EPA implement these Basel requirements under its existing authority? As discussed above, it is at least arguable that section 3017 confers authority on EPA to implement the requirements of any applicable international agreement governing the export of hazardous waste to which the United States is a party. If ratified, the provisions of Basel would fall under section 3017(a)(2) and would thus arguably be either directly enforceable or subject to EPA regulatory authority. The ability of Congress to prospectively confer domestic effect on subsequently ratified treaties may be questionable, but the question has not been answered.

Further, is it so clear that EPA could not adopt the requirements of Basel under its existing RCRA authority? Certainly, specific implementing legislation would clarify and provide certainty, but it is worth considering what, if any, additional authority EPA would need to implement Basel. EPA has asserted that adequate authority exists under RCRA to

344 Hearings on Envtl. Prot., testimony of W. Reilly, supra note 5.
345 See Johnson, supra note 341, at 315.
346 Can EPA ban the export of wastes to non-Basel members? The issue is probably moot. At this point, 176 countries have ratified the Basel Convention. See Basel Convention’s Ratifications, supra note 3. Not a single hazardous waste export reported to EPA in the last ten years has been to a country that is not a party to Basel. Compare id. with infra Table 1. The issue of whether EPA could ban exports to non-OECD countries even without United States ratification of Basel is discussed below.
implement the OECD Decision, and the OECD Decision was revised in 2001 specifically to “harmonize” its provisions with the Basel Convention.\textsuperscript{347} Further, EPA has stated that the OECD Decision is consistent with the “environmentally sound management” requirements of Basel and thus, under Article 11 of Basel, it qualifies as an agreement that will allow trade between the United States and the members of the OECD who are Basel parties.\textsuperscript{348} If EPA can implement the OECD Decision, why not Basel?

Consider Administrator Reilly’s objections. First, he states that RCRA, unlike the Basel Convention, does not allow for the regulation of the export of nonhazardous municipal waste.\textsuperscript{349} This may be true, but must ratification of Basel wait for this authority?\textsuperscript{350} The Canada/U.S. Agreement was amended to regulate the export of municipal solid waste between the

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\textsuperscript{347} The introduction to EPA’s 2010 Subpart H regulations notes that “[t]he goal of the 2001 OECD Decision was to harmonize the procedures and requirements of the OECD with those of the Basel Convention.” Revisions to the Requirements for: Transboundary Shipments of Hazardous Wastes, 75 Fed. Reg. 1236, 1238 (June 8, 2010); see also Request for Information Concerning Transfrontier Movements of Wastes Destined for Recovery Operations Within the OECD Area, 64 Fed. Reg. 44,722 (Aug. 17, 1999) (EPA information request analyzing issues associated with harmonizing the OECD Decision and the Basel Convention). The Preamble to the 2001 OECD Decision notes that the purpose of revisions to the original OECD Decision was to seek “harmonization” with Basel and to continue the applicability of the Decision under Article 11 of the Basel Convention. OECD Decision, supra note 62, at 6.

\textsuperscript{348} In the preamble to its 1996 Subpart H regulations, EPA stated that:

The Decision, which entered into force before May 5, 1992, satisfies the requirements of Article 11 of the Basel Convention because it is a pre-existing multilateral agreement compatible with the environmentally sound management of wastes as required by the Convention. Therefore, today’s promulgation of Subpart H as part of the RCRA hazardous waste export and import regulations, which is necessary to implement the Decision, will make it possible for persons within the United States to continue exporting and importing Basel-covered RCRA hazardous waste for recovery within the OECD, even if other OECD countries are Parties to the Basel Convention.


\textsuperscript{349} \textit{Hearings on Envtl. Prot.}, testimony of W. Reilly, supra note 5, at 642.

\textsuperscript{350} Section 3017 generally applies only to Subtitle C hazardous wastes. RCRA § 3017(a) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(a) (2006)). See infra notes 393–409 and accompanying text. If section 3017(a)(2) confers authority to implement international agreements, it is limited to those provisions dealing with hazardous waste, and it would not provide a basis for regulating “municipal solid waste” under the Canada/U.S. Agreement or “other wastes” under Basel.

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countries, but that ratified international obligation has apparently not yet been implemented.

Second, he states that RCRA does not contain authority to require notice and consent on the export of hazardous wastes. On its face this is obviously wrong; RCRA does contain such a requirement, and EPA imposes this requirement on the export to countries with which we have no treaties. He may, however, have been referring to a potential concern that the definition of “hazardous wastes” under Basel is broader than the definition of Subtitle C hazardous wastes regulated under RCRA, and that regulations issued under section 3017 could not fully address the scope of Basel wastes. The definition of hazardous waste under the OECD Decision is now quite similar to that contained in the Basel Convention, and it is not clear the extent to which the U.S. national definition of hazardous waste is inconsistent with the OECD Decision October 31, 2011 or Basel.

Third, Administrator Reilly identified concerns with “recovering” the costs of wastes that must be reimported. This is not expressly a concern about the authority to impose a “reimport” or “take-back” requirement. EPA apparently has concluded that RCRA provides such authority since it has adopted a “take-back” requirement as part of the Subpart E and Subpart H regulations. Rather, the Administrator’s expressed concern was over the government’s authority to recover any costs it expends if obligated to take back wastes. The government’s cost recovery authority is not, however, relevant to its Basel obligations. While cost recovery authority may be a good idea, the Basel Convention does not require it.

Finally, perhaps the most significant concern regarding ratification of Basel relates to EPA’s ability to implement the Basel requirement that

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351 Amendment to Canada/U.S. Bilateral Agreement, supra note 49.
352 See commentary supra note 49.
353 Hearings on Envtl. Prot., testimony of W. Reilly, supra note 5, at 642.
354 RCRA § 3017(e)–(o) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(e)–(o) (2006)).
355 See supra notes 275–76 and accompanying text.
357 In 1999, EPA issued an “information request” seeking comments on the implications of the OECD efforts to harmonize the OECD Decision with the Basel Convention. Request for Information Concerning Transfrontier Movements of Wastes Destined for Recovery Operations Within the OECD Area, 64 Fed. Reg. 44,722 (Aug. 17, 1990). This request contained an extensive discussion of the potential differences between the OECD class of green and amber wastes and the waste covered by Basel. See id.
358 Hearings on Envtl. Prot., testimony of W. Reilly, supra note 5, at 642.
359 40 C.F.R. §§ 262.54, 262.82 (2010).
exports be prohibited unless they will be managed in an “environmentally sound manner” in the importing country. The significance of this requirement is questionable given the ambiguity of the term under Basel. Nonetheless, this provision would presumably require that EPA have the authority to prohibit exports based on the adequacy of their management in the importing country. As discussed below, EPA’s position on its authority to consider “extraterritorial environmental” impacts in establishing export requirements is somewhat inconsistent. But the OECD Decision and EPA’s implementing Subpart H regulations currently include requirements based on “environmentally sound” management in the importing country. If EPA has existing authority to implement the OECD Decision, it may have authority to implement comparable requirements of the Basel Convention. The more general question of EPA’s authority to ban the exports of hazardous waste based on the environmental impact in the receiving country is discussed below.

B. Could EPA Ban the Export of Hazardous Wastes to Non-OECD Countries?

The primary concern relating to the export of hazardous wastes has been the potential for mismanagement in less-developed countries. Both perceived economic incentives and inadequate institutional capacity suggest that a notice and consent regime will not adequately address the human health and environmental concerns arising from the export of hazardous wastes to these countries. This has led for calls to adopt the

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360 Basel, supra note 3, at art. 4.2(g). Additionally, Article 4.9(a) also requires that the exporting country allow exports only if it, the exporting country, does not have the capacity or facilities to dispose of the wastes in an “environmentally sound and efficient manner.” Id. at art. 4.9(a). The United States has stated its “understanding” that under Basel, “an exporting State may decide that it lacks the capacity to dispose of wastes in an ‘environmentally sound and efficient manner’ if disposal in the importing country would be both environmentally sound and economically efficient.” See Basel Convention’s Ratifications, supra note 3.

361 A variety of technical guidelines describing “environmentally sound management” practices have been issued to implement the Basel requirement. See Technical Guidelines, BASEL CONVENTION, http://www.basel.int/meetings/sbc/workdoc/techdocs.html (last visited Nov. 8, 2011).

362 See infra notes 390–93 and accompanying text.

363 See, e.g., 40 C.F.R. § 262.82(d), (e).

364 See infra notes 379–93 and accompanying text.

“Basel Ban” that would prohibit, under the Basel Convention, the export of hazardous wastes to certain less-developed countries. EPA, without explanation, has stated that it does not have the authority to implement the Basel Ban. See Johnson, supra note 341, at 315. Certainly, EPA does not have authority under the terms of the Basel Convention; not only is the United States not a ratifying party, but the Basel Ban is, by most accounts, not an enforceable obligation even among ratifying parties.

Congress has also considered, but not adopted, amendments to RCRA that would ban the export of hazardous wastes to countries with whom the United States does not have a specific waste export agreement. EPA has on several occasions, however, flatly stated that it does not have the authority to ban the exports of waste because section 3017 only provides for a “notice and consent” regime, not an outright ban.

Could EPA, under its existing RCRA authority, ban the export of hazardous wastes to non-OECD countries with which the United States has no export agreements? Section 3017 generally provides EPA with the authority to implement a base notice and consent regime and other requirements contained in an appropriate bilateral treaty. EPA has several times, however, flatly stated that it does not have the authority to ban the exports of waste because section 3017 only provides for a “notice and consent” regime, not an outright ban.

EPA cannot grant this request since the statute does not give EPA the legal authority to implement an outright ban on hazardous waste exports. Specifically, RCRA section 3017 prohibits exports of hazardous waste unless either: (1) The shipments are covered under and conform to the terms specified in an agreement between the U.S. and the receiving country; or (2) the exporter has submitted written notification to EPA, obtained written consent from the receiving country via EPA, attached a copy of the written consent to the RCRA hazardous waste manifest for each shipment, and ensures that the shipments comply with the terms of the receiving country’s consent. Moreover, section 3017 directs the State Department, on behalf of EPA, to forward a copy of the notification to the intended country of import within 30 days of EPA receiving a complete notification concerning a proposed waste export that would not be covered under the terms of an existing international agreement. Therefore, an outright ban regarding all exports of any individual hazardous waste (e.g. SLABs) or all hazardous wastes to non-OECD countries would require changes to the statutory language and is outside the scope of this regulatory action.

requirements of section 3017(a); section 3017(h) authorizes EPA to promul-
gate “other standards” for the export of hazardous waste under the pro-
visions of sections 3002 and 3003 of RCRA. Under section 3017(f), these
“other standards” can only apply to exports to countries with which the
United States does not have an international agreement. In other words,
Congress clearly contemplated that EPA have the authority to impose
something beyond the base notice and consent requirements for exports
to countries with which we have no applicable international agreements.
Determining whether EPA could ban the export of wastes to non-OECD
countries thus hinges on its authority under section 3017(h).

EPA appears to have used its authority to impose “other standards”
under section 3017(h) in only one instance. EPA’s Subpart E regulations
require notification, but not consent, of countries through which exported
wastes transit. Although the base requirements of section 3017(a)(1) re-
quire notice and consent by the receiving country, they impose no require-
ments relating to transit countries. Noting an OECD Decision requiring
notice to transit countries, EPA stated “[a]ccordingly, EPA has exercised
its authority pursuant to section 3017(h) to require exporters to notify EPA
of any countries through which a hazardous waste will pass en route to the
receiving country.” Thus, under section 3017(h), EPA imposed domestic
obligations based on extraterritorial concerns.

The question whether section 3017(h) allows EPA to regulate
exports based on concerns about their effect on “human health and the
environment” outside the United States remains unaddressed. Several
arguments can be made that EPA does not have such authority. First,
Congress in section 3017 presumably established a policy of relying on
notice and consent of the receiving country even in the absence of an appro-
priate bilateral treaty between the United States and the receiving country.
This policy is consistent not only with general international principles re-
garding state sovereignty but also international environmental documents,
including the Stockholm and Rio Declarations, which generally ratify the
authority of countries to establish their own internal environmental

370 RCRA § 3017(h) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(h) (2006)).
371 Id. § 3017(f) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(f) (2006)).
373 Id. § 3017(a)(1) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(a)(1) (2006)).
374 Hazardous Waste Management System; Exports of Hazardous Waste, 51 Fed. Reg. 8744,
8755 (proposed Mar. 13, 1986).
375 RCRA § 3017(h) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(h) (2006)).
376 Id. §§ 3017(h), 3018 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 6938(h), 6939 (2006)).
policies. This argument, however, ultimately begs the question; Congress imposed a base notice and consent requirement, but it also conferred authority on EPA to impose other standards for the export of hazardous waste. Thus, whatever presumptive policy of “notice and consent” endorsed by Congress, Congress also specifically authorized other requirements in appropriate circumstances.

Second, the limited case law addressing the issue suggests that RCRA does not have “extraterritorial” effect. At least one court has held that United States exporters are not liable for creating an “imminent and substantial endangerment” for wastes managed outside the United States. It seems unlikely that RCRA would be construed to authorize EPA to regulate or penalize conduct occurring outside of the United States. A conclusion that RCRA does not provide EPA authority to regulate conduct outside of the United States begs the relevant issue. The question with which we are confronted is whether EPA can regulate the domestic management of hazardous wastes by prohibiting their export to certain countries.

Third, EPA’s authority to impose “other standards” on exports is based on its authority under sections 3002 or 3003. These sections allow EPA to regulate generators and transporters “as may be necessary to protect human health and the environment.” It is other sections of RCRA, including section 3004, that confer authority to regulate “treatment, storage and disposal facilities” themselves in order to protect human health and the

377 See Tarlock, supra note 6, at 43 n.37.
378 RCRA § 3017 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938 (2006)).
379 Amlon Metals v. FMC Corp., 775 F. Supp. 668 (S.D.N.Y. 1991) (citizen suit for “imminent and substantial endangerment” not available for endangerment arising in another country). Cf. Basel Action Network v. Mar. Admin., 370 F. Supp. 2d 57 (D.D.C. 2005) (claimed RCRA violation for export of defunct naval vessels for disposal does not authorize RCRA citizen suit since any prior export would be a wholly past violation and any future export would not be a basis to allege a current imminent and substantial endangerment). The court also held that there is a presumption against territorial effect of United States statutes and the National Environmental Policy Act did not have extraterritorial effect. Id. at 71.
381 See Envtl. Def. Fund v. Massey, 986 F.2d 528 (D.C. Cir. 1993) (conclusion that NEPA requires assessment of environmental impacts abroad does not imply that NEPA has extraterritorial reach since the obligation to perform assessment is directed at domestic federal actor).
383 Id. § 3002(a) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6922(a) (2006)).
environment,\textsuperscript{384} and Congress did not cross-reference these authorities as a basis for imposing “other” export requirements.\textsuperscript{385} This at least suggests that Congress did not intend for EPA to establish “other standards” based on concerns about the operation of foreign recycling and disposal facilities. On the other hand, a prohibition on generators and transporters from exporting wastes to non-OECD countries is not a specific regulation of the foreign facilities, and a prohibition on exporters could be seen as “necessary” to protect human health and the environment. As noted, EPA has used its “other standards” authority to impose a requirement to notify transit countries, and this obligation is based on extraterritorial concerns.\textsuperscript{386}

Ultimately, the authority of EPA to prohibit exports to non-OECD countries comes down to whether EPA can regulate domestic conduct under RCRA based on concerns about extraterritorial environmental effects. As discussed above, EPA has tailored its export regulations based on concerns about the environmental impacts in the receiving country. In justifying its decision to impose a notice and consent requirement on the export of SLABs, EPA stated that it:

—would like to focus on the use of preventative measures to decrease the proportionate risks to human health and the global environment. There are inherent human health and environmental hazards associated with a significant amount of SLABs being exported across borders without the knowledge and consent of receiving countries and/or SLABs being exported to countries with substandard smelting infrastructures. Amending the current RCRA hazardous waste regulations to include the notification and consent requirements would help ensure that SLABs are exported to countries with the capacity to handle them in an environmentally sound manner and to aid countries with tracking the movements and life-cycle management of SLABs inside their borders. . . .

EPA believes that the potential reduction in risk to human health and the environment with this proposed modification will outweigh the incremental increase in burden to SLAB exporters.\textsuperscript{387}

\textsuperscript{384} Id. § 3004 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6924 (2006)).

\textsuperscript{385} See id. §§ 3302–04 (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 6922–24 (2006)).

\textsuperscript{386} See supra note 375 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{387} Revisions to: the Requirements for Transboundary Shipments of Hazardous Wastes Between OECD Countries, 73 Fed. Reg. 58,388, 58,391 (proposed Oct. 6, 2008).
Thus, concerns about mismanagement of recycled SLAB outside of the United States formed part of its justification for regulating the export of recycled SLABs otherwise largely exempt from domestic regulation.388

EPA also considered environmental effects outside the United States in developing conditional exclusions. Although EPA initially declined to regulate the export of conditionally excluded CRTs, in the final rule, EPA imposed a basic notice and consent requirement. In its “Response to Comments” document, EPA explained:

The comments, and data submitted by the commenters, have convinced us that unfettered export of CRTs for recycling could lead to environmental harm. Information in the record shows that exported electronics may not be handled as valuable commodities in foreign countries. In fact, there is documentation that they are sometimes managed so carelessly that they pose possible human health and environmental risks from such practices as open burning, land disposal, and dumping into rivers.389

Similarly, in its “reclamation exclusion,” EPA imposed a notice and consent requirement “so that it can ensure that the hazardous secondary materials are reclaimed rather than disposed of or abandoned.”390 In that same rule, EPA established a domestic exclusion for wastes that reclaimed “under the control of the generator.”391 EPA, however, declined to apply this domestic exclusion to exported wastes. EPA stated that it did not apply the “under the control” test because “EPA would not be able to ensure the close management and monitoring by a single entity of hazardous secondary materials in a foreign country.”392 Thus, consideration of potential mismanagement outside the United States formed the basis of EPA’s conditional exclusions of exported wastes.393

388 EPA also justified imposing the notice and consent requirement because it was consistent with section 3017 and there were advantages to consistency with OECD requirements. See id.
390 Revisions to the Definition of Solid Waste, 73 Fed. Reg. 64,668, 64,698 (Oct. 30, 2008).
391 Id. at 64,699.
392 Id. at 64,738.
393 As discussed above, EPA’s logic in both the CRT and reclamation exclusions is subtler than “mere” concern about avoiding environmental harm in the receiving country. See Gaba, supra note 30, at 88. Rather, EPA justified imposing conditions on the export of
EPA has thus used concerns about extraterritorial environmental effects to justify imposing a notice and consent requirement in a manner consistent with section 3017(a).\(^{394}\) It has also relied on its authority under section 3017(h) to impose a notice requirement for transit countries.\(^{395}\) And section 3017(h) clearly authorizes the regulation of generators and transporters "as may be necessary to protect human health and the environment."\(^{396}\) At a minimum, the question of EPA’s authority to prohibit the export of hazardous wastes under section 3017(h) based on concerns about their impact on human health and the environment in countries with which the United States does not have an international agreement cannot be dismissed as lightly as EPA has in the past.

C. What are the Limits of EPA’s Authority to Exclude Hazardous Waste from RCRA Export Controls?

Section 3017 requires EPA to regulate the export of Subtitle C hazardous wastes.\(^{397}\) EPA has, however, used two distinct bases from excluding materials that might fall within the basic Subtitle C definition of hazardous waste from export controls. First, EPA regulations generally provide that only Subtitle C hazardous wastes are subject to mandatory export controls, and thus the exclusion of a material from classification as a hazardous waste exempts the material from export controls.\(^{398}\) Second, EPA regulations generally provide that only materials subject to a domestic manifest requirement are subject to notice and consent requirements.\(^{399}\) Amongst other things, this requirement excludes all CESQG hazardous wastes from any export controls.\(^{400}\) Can EPA exclude materials that would otherwise be regulated hazardous wastes on either of these bases?

1. Exclusion from Classification as a Subtitle C Hazardous Waste

Section 3017 does not apply generally to “hazardous wastes”; rather the section applies to “hazardous waste identified or listed” under materials based on the rather circular argument that potential improper management is evidence that the material is a waste. \textit{Id.} at 93. In other words, EPA imposed requirements to avoid the classification that would justify the requirements.

\(^{394}\) RCRA § 3017(a) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(a) (2006)).

\(^{395}\) \textit{Id.} § 3017(h) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(h) (2006)).

\(^{396}\) \textit{Id.} §§ 3002, 3017(h) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. §§ 6293, 6938(h) (2006)).

\(^{397}\) \textit{Id.} § 3017(a) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(a) (2006)).


\(^{399}\) \textit{Id.} at 28,669.

\(^{400}\) \textit{Id.}
Subtitle C of RCRA.\textsuperscript{401} In other words, the export requirements only apply to materials regulated as hazardous waste under Subtitle C.\textsuperscript{402} In EPA’s view, any material which is not classified as a Subtitle C hazardous waste is thus not subject to export controls under section 3017.\textsuperscript{403} The express statutory limitation of section 3017 to the export of Subtitle C wastes is compelling support for this position.\textsuperscript{404} At a minimum, this means that the export of nonhazardous solid wastes not otherwise regulated under Subtitle C, including nonhazardous municipal wastes, cannot be regulated under section 3017.\textsuperscript{405}

There are, however, a significant number of wastes that meet the definition of Subtitle C hazardous wastes, either because they have been listed or exhibit a hazard characteristic, which EPA has expressly excluded from classification as a Subtitle C hazardous waste. 40 C.F.R. § 261.4 is chock-a-block full of an increasing number of wastes that EPA has, by regulation, excluded from classification as a Subtitle C hazardous waste, and, in most cases, this exclusion has the effect of totally exempting the waste from export controls.\textsuperscript{406} If EPA has properly excluded a material from classification as a Subtitle C hazardous waste, then it does follow that the material is not subject to export controls under section 3017. The legitimacy of excluding a material from export controls would thus hinge on the legitimacy of EPA’s decision to exclude the material from classification as a Subtitle C hazardous waste and not on any separate requirements of section 3017.

\textsuperscript{401} RCRA § 3017(a) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(a) (2006)).

\textsuperscript{402} As discussed above, section 3001 of RCRA authorizes EPA to “identify or list” hazardous wastes for purposes of regulation under Subtitle C, RCRA § 3001(b) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6921(b) (2006)), and EPA regulations provide that “solid wastes,” defined in 40 C.F.R. § 261.3(a), will be hazardous wastes if they either exhibit a hazard characteristic or are “listed” by EPA. 40 C.F.R. § 261.3(a) (2010).

\textsuperscript{403} Hazardous Management System; Exports of Hazardous Waste, 51 Fed. Reg. at 28,671.

\textsuperscript{404} With limited exceptions, regulations established under Subtitle C (which includes section 3017) are limited to the class of Subtitle C hazardous wastes defined by EPA regulations. See 40 C.F.R. § 261.1(a), (b).

\textsuperscript{405} This also means that EPA cannot under RCRA regulate the export of materials that are classified as hazardous wastes by the importing country but not by the United States under RCRA. Hazardous Waste Management System; Exports of Hazardous Waste, 51 Fed. Reg. at 28,671. And, as noted above, this means that EPA does not have the authority under section 3017 to impose requirements on the export of nonhazardous OECD “green” wastes. See supra note 49 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{406} 40 C.F.R. § 261.4 (2010). Scrap metal exported for recycling, for example, is exempt from any export controls because EPA has exempted scrap metal from classification as a hazardous waste. Id. § 261.4(13)(a).
2. The Exclusion of Non-Manifested Hazardous Waste

Section 3017 generally imposes a notice and consent requirement on the export of any Subtitle C hazardous waste; it contains no exclusion for hazardous wastes that are not subject to a manifest requirement.\(^{407}\) EPA adopted the “manifest exclusion” as part of its original 1986 export regulations,\(^{408}\) and at that time it stated that, in its view:

Congress could not have intended to regulate for export those “hazardous wastes” which EPA does not regulate domestically. It is highly unlikely that Congress would have been more concerned about wastes exported than wastes in its own backyard.\(^{409}\)

Parts of EPA’s rationale for this conclusion are less than compelling. According to EPA, Congressional intent to take an “equally firm” stand on the export of hazardous waste as on domestic regulation means that if hazardous wastes are exempt from manifest requirements they are exempt from any export controls.\(^{410}\) EPA acknowledged that non-manifested wastes may still be subject to some domestic RCRA requirements, but nonetheless concluded that exclusion from the manifest requirements justified exclusion from any notice and consent requirement on export.\(^{411}\) According to EPA, “the function served by the manifest domestically is similar to the function served by the notification and consent internationally.”\(^{412}\) These functions include providing information about the waste and a tracking document to ensure proper delivery of the waste.\(^{413}\) But the notice and consent requirement for the export of hazardous waste obviously serves the additional purpose of providing governments the opportunity to object to

\(^{407}\) RCRA § 3017(a) (codified as amended at 42 U.S.C. § 6938(a) (2006)). The Canada/U.S. Agreement is, however, expressly limited to hazardous wastes that are subject to the manifest requirement. Canada/U.S. Agreement, supra note 49, at art. 1(b) (“Hazardous waste” is defined “with respect to the United States, hazardous waste subject to a manifest requirement in the United States.”).


\(^{409}\) Id. at 28,670.

\(^{410}\) Id.

\(^{411}\) Id. at 28,670–71.

\(^{412}\) Id. at 28,670.

One other argument made by EPA does, however, more clearly support the exclusion of non-manifested waste from the requirements of section 3017. Section 3017(a)(1)(C) requires that a copy of the importing country’s written consent be “attached to the manifest accompanying each waste shipment.” This language at least suggests that Congress contemplated that all wastes subject to export controls would have a manifest. It is also, of course, possible to read this section as requiring that exports of hazardous wastes be accompanied by a manifest even if not subject to a domestic manifest requirement. EPA’s argument that this language supports applying export controls only to manifested wastes loses some force from the fact that EPA does impose notice and consent requirements on some hazardous wastes, such as SLABs, that are exempt from domestic manifest requirements.

Ultimately, however, EPA’s general exclusion of non-manifested wastes is based on EPA’s judgment that such wastes pose little environmental risk and therefore do not need to be regulated through a notice and consent regime. EPA, in other contexts, has been rebuffed in its attempts to narrow the scope of RCRA based on its views of the environmental need and the administrative burden of regulation. Given the unequivocal scope

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414 Id. at 28,671.
415 EPA also justified excluding wastes that are not subject to a manifest requirement by arguing that, if there was no manifest requirement, EPA would be unable to police the export of hazardous waste. Id. This argument would be more compelling if, as noted, EPA did not impose notice and consent requirements on certain wastes, such as SLABs, that are exempt from a domestic manifest requirement. Such wastes must still be accompanied by an Acknowledgment of Consent and the exporter must still notify EPA. See supra Part III.D.
419 In the early days of RCRA, EPA attempted to adopt a regulatory exclusion for special “low-toxicity and high-volume” wastes, Gaba, supra note 30, at 97, and for generators of less than 1000 kilograms per month of hazardous waste. See Richard Ottinger, Strengthening of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act in 1984: The Original Loopholes, the Amendments, and the Political Factors Behind Their Passage, 3 PACE ENVTL. L. REV. 1, 14 (1985). There was considerable controversy and Congress subsequently provided special statutory treatment for “special wastes” and authorized the reduced treatment of “conditionally exempt small quantity generators” that generated 100 kilograms per month or less of hazardous waste. 40 C.F.R. § 261.5 (2010).
of section 3017, EPA’s blanket exclusion of non-manifested hazardous wastes from export controls is, at the very least, questionable.

D. Can EPA Regulate the Export of Hazardous Wastes that are Exempt from Domestic Regulation?

Although EPA generally has taken the positions that it can only regulate exports of Subtitle C hazardous wastes that are subject to domestic regulation, EPA has paradoxically also asserted authority to regulate the export of wastes that are not domestically regulated and that are excluded from classification as hazardous wastes. In other words, EPA has taken the position that it can exempt hazardous wastes from domestic regulation while at the same time imposing notice and consent export requirements.

It has accomplished this feat on one of two bases. First, EPA has consistently claimed the authority to impose less stringent regulatory requirements on Subtitle C hazardous wastes that are recycled. 40 C.F.R. Part 266 contains a set of regulations applicable to the recycling of specified wastes or to specific recycling techniques. EPA apparently claims that it can use this authority either to exempt or substantially reduce the domestic regulation of Subtitle C hazardous waste while still imposing a notice and consent requirement if the wastes are exported. Thus, EPA has excluded recycled SLABs, a Subtitle C hazardous waste, from domestic regulation while imposing export requirements.

Second, EPA has used the technique of “conditional exemption” to exempt materials from classification as hazardous wastes while at the same time imposing regulatory requirements as a condition of the exclusion. Thus, EPA has excluded recycled CRTs from classification as a hazardous waste but required that exporters comply with notice and consent requirements. EPA’s rationale for the use of “conditional exemptions”

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421 See Revisions to the Requirements for: Transboundary Shipments of Hazardous Wastes Between OECD Member Countries, 75 Fed. Reg. 1236.
422 Gaba, supra note 30, at 105–07.
423 Id. at 96.
424 40 C.F.R. § 266 (2010).
426 See id.
427 Gaba, supra note 30, at 88.
is not altogether clear; it appears to vary depending on whether the waste is excluded from classification as a “solid waste” under section 261.4(a) or as a “hazardous waste” under section 261.4(b).

EPA’s conditional exclusions from classification as a “solid waste” have been justified, in part, based on a conclusion that the materials, if managed as required by the conditional exclusion, will be managed in a “commodity-like” rather than waste-like manner, and will thus not have the “element of discard” necessary to classify the material as a solid waste.\textsuperscript{429} Both in its CRT exclusion and its “reclamation exclusion,” EPA claims that the notice and consent condition is justified in order to ensure that the exported wastes will be properly managed in a commodity-like manner.\textsuperscript{430} In other words, EPA claims that it can exempt domestically recycled wastes from classification as a solid waste while at the same time imposing export controls on those same materials based on concerns that the materials will not be properly managed outside the United States.

EPA’s conditional exclusions from classification as a “hazardous” solid waste have been based on a distinct (but similar) rationale. Under sections 1003 and 3001 of RCRA, EPA can classify a solid waste as hazardous if there is a plausible basis for concluding the waste will be “mismanaged.”\textsuperscript{431} Thus, EPA has conditionally excluded certain wastes based on a conclusion that, if managed according to the conditions, there is no plausible likelihood that it will be mismanaged.\textsuperscript{432} In these cases, EPA does not claim that the materials are not solid wastes, but rather that under RCRA it may exclude a waste from classification as a hazardous waste if there is no plausible risk of mismanagement.\textsuperscript{433} Although based on a different legal justification than that used to exclude “solid wastes,” the bottom line is similar. EPA can impose a notice and consent requirement on exported wastes based on concerns about the way it will be managed outside the United States.

EPA’s claim that it can impose notice and consent requirements on wastes exported for recycling while at the same time imposing little or no domestic regulation suggests that EPA could, for example, exempt domestic regulation of recycled scrap metal while still imposing notice and consent

\textsuperscript{429} See id. at 42,934.
\textsuperscript{430} See id. at 42,938 (notice and consent in CRT exclusion necessary since they may not be handled as a “commodity.”); Revisions to the Definition of Hazardous Waste, 73 Fed. Reg. at 64,698 (notice and consent requirements in the reclamation exclusion “help determine that the materials are not discarded.”).

\textsuperscript{431} See Gaba, supra note 30, at 111.

\textsuperscript{432} Id. at 107–09.

\textsuperscript{433} Id. at 108.
requirements on exported scrap metal. More significantly, this also suggests a way for EPA to exempt domestically recycled electronic wastes from regulation while still implementing export controls.

VI. IMPROVING THE REGULATION OF HAZARDOUS WASTE EXPORTS

Although EPA may have authority to regulate the export of wastes more stringently, there are steps it could take to improve its regulation of wastes currently subject to its export requirements.

A. Clarify Determination of the Toxicity Characteristic for E-Wastes

Much of the concern on exports of hazardous waste focuses on the export of electronic wastes for recycling. E-wastes that exhibit a hazardous characteristic exported for reclamation have always been subject to the Subpart E notice and consent requirements, but EPA has generally taken the position that only circuit boards, CRTs, and CRT glass exhibit a hazardous characteristic. Thus, EPA has assumed that all other e-wastes are exempt from export controls since they are not Subtitle C hazardous wastes.

As discussed above, however, the same data that led EPA to conclude that CRTs exhibit a hazard characteristic also suggest that other e-wastes are hazardous. Given that the obligation to make a hazard determination falls on the generator, exporters of e-wastes should be concerned about their potential for liability. Indeed, a few citizen suits against such exporters might focus their minds wonderfully.

It would, however, be appropriate for EPA to step up to the plate and clarify the hazardous waste status of most e-wastes. First, EPA can undertake additional studies to determine the possibility that various categories of e-wastes exhibit a characteristic. If EPA finds some level of likelihood that a type of e-waste exhibits a characteristic, it should act to enforce. Generators have the obligation to determine if their materials constitute hazardous wastes, and, with sufficient data generated by EPA,

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434 See supra note 2 and accompanying text.
435 40 C.F.R. § 262.50 (2010).
436 See supra note 268 and accompanying text.
437 See supra note 270 and accompanying text.
438 40 C.F.R. § 262.11.
439 Id.
generators would be hard-pressed to rely on “knowledge of process” to justify a determination that the waste is not hazardous.  

Second, EPA could adopt clarifications of the Toxicity Characteristic Leachate Procedure (“TCLP”) to specify the methodology to be used in assessing the toxicity of products like e-wastes. The current methodology for performing a TCLP does not adequately address the problem of obtaining appropriate samples from products.  

Studies used by EPA have discussed alternative methodologies and EPA should evaluate whether alternative techniques for measuring the toxicity of electronic products should be adopted.

Finally, one presumes that EPA is less than enthusiastic about bringing the class of discarded and reclaimed e-wastes into the domestic hazardous waste system. The policy and environmental implications of classifying e-wastes as hazardous for domestic regulation is beyond the scope of this article, but there are methods EPA could use to ensure minimal notice and consent requirements for exports while exempting domestic management. EPA could, as it has for CRTs, exclude other e-wastes from classification as a solid waste but impose a “conditional exclusion” requirement for exported e-wastes. Alternatively, EPA could adopt the approach it uses in regulating SLABs: special regulatory treatment of recycled e-wastes which eliminates domestic manifest requirements while preserving a notice and consent obligation.

B. Provide Greater Transparency Regarding U.S. Hazardous Waste Exports

The entire system of export controls relies on the effectiveness of government policing of imports and exports through notice and consent. It is a safe assumption that the effectiveness of government supervision is enhanced by transparency and political accountability. In other words, the effectiveness of a notice and consent regime would be increased by publicizing information about exports.

At the moment, exporters of regulated materials must submit a notice of intent to EPA.  

440 See id. (requiring generators to make a hazardous waste determination and allowing them to make this determination, not through testing of the wastes, but based on their knowledge of the waste “in light of the materials or the processes used”).

441 See RCRA Toxicity Characterization, supra note 269, at 1-3 to 1-4.

States Department of State and the governments of any importing or transit countries. Acknowledgements of consent to export are provided to exporters by EPA. Noteworthy is the absence of any public notice of transactions involving the export of hazardous waste.

EPA has recently taken one significant step in providing information about hazardous waste exports. Following adoption of the OECD/SLAB rules, EPA stated its intent “in the interests of transparency” to provide online public posting of summaries of Notices of Intent to export to non-OECD countries. This information is now available, but it is not clear how frequently the information is updated.

Other than this new source of information about proposed exports to non-OECD countries, information about the export of materials subject to EPA’s export regulations is buried in EPA files. One can find anecdotal information from EPA about the scope of exports and it is possible to obtain information through FOIA request. But haphazard, time-consuming, and costly methods of disclosure surely do not further the purposes of RCRA. It is certainly not consistent with the requirement of RCRA that “[p]ublic participation in the development, revision, implementation, and enforcement of any regulation, guideline, information, or program under this chapter shall be provided for, encouraged, and assisted by the Administrator and the States.”

At a minimum, EPA should post summary information, such as that provided by EPA in response to a FOIA request, that includes information about the amounts and destinations of hazardous wastes exported from the United States. Public access to actual information about the annual

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443 **Id.**
444 **Id.**
445 **See id.** EPA stated that it will post:

summary information for all future notices we receive concerning a proposed export of RCRA hazardous waste to a non-OECD country. The online information will list the exporter name, exporter address, waste text description, proposed receiving country, and consent status (e.g., notice submitted to foreign country, whether the foreign country consents or objects). Moreover, EPA’s cover letters for notices concerning exports to non-OECD countries will remind the countries, when appropriate, of the relevant Basel hazardous waste listing and the Basel Convention prohibition on transboundary shipments of hazardous waste between Basel parties and a non-party like the United States.

**Id.**
446 **Proposed Hazardous Waste Exports to Non-OECD Countries, supra** note 235. This is the current correct link to the online information; the web address specified in the OECD/SLAB rule is not accurate.
number of exports and their destination would be consistent with EPA’s public participation obligations and provide some greater confidence in the export program.\textsuperscript{448}

But posting of “after the fact” exports summaries does not fully ensure appropriate public participation. Why doesn’t EPA simply post online information regarding all Notices of Intent to export, and not simply those regarding exports to non-OECD countries? Immediate posting of information about Notices of Intent would allow interested members of the public to identify pending exports and have greater ability to assure compliance with RCRA and proper management in the receiving country.

This is not to say that there are not both legal and political problems with publicizing Notices of Intent. The legal problem primarily arises from prohibitions on disclosure of Confidential Business Information (“CBI”). The Freedom of Information Act and EPA regulations provide an exception from public disclosures of CBI.\textsuperscript{449} Additionally, both the Canada/U.S. Agreement and the Mexico/U.S. Agreement contain limitations on the publication of CBI.\textsuperscript{450}

EPA now deals with the issue of CBI in export notices in a number of ways. First, 40 C.F.R. § 260.2(b) provides that any information submitted pursuant to Parts 260–265 and 268, including specifically information contained in Notices of Intent (“NOI”) to export, will not be classified as CBI unless the party submits a claim of confidentiality at the time the notice is submitted.\textsuperscript{451} Therefore, for most NOIs, the exporter will have waived claims of confidentiality unless a specific claim has been submitted with the notice. Although this may waive the right to assert confidentiality by the exporter, EPA has stated that this does not waive claims of CBI by other parties.\textsuperscript{452} To address confidentiality claims by these parties, EPA has on several occasions published notices requesting other “affected parties” to submit information about confidentiality claims with respect to previously submitted NOIs.\textsuperscript{453} Under EPA’s approach, if no party submits information in response to the notice, claims of confidentiality have been waived.

\textsuperscript{448} EPA’s current procedures for dealing with confidential business information, discussed below, would be adequate to allow publication of periodic summary information about waste exports.


\textsuperscript{450} See Canada/U.S. Agreement, \textit{supra} note 49, at art. 8; Mexico/U.S. Agreement, \textit{supra} note 55, at art. XIII.

\textsuperscript{451} 40 C.F.R. § 260.2(b).

\textsuperscript{452} 40 C.F.R. § 262.54(e).

This process is further complicated by limiting language in 40 C.F.R. § 260.2(b). The requirement in section 260.2(b) to submit a contemporaneous claim of confidentiality is limited to NOIs submitted under the export requirements specified in Parts 260–265 and 268. This includes export requirements for most wastes, but it does not include NOIs submitted for universal waste exports because the universal waste export requirements are contained in 40 C.F.R. Part 273. Therefore, EPA has concluded that it is necessary to provide an opportunity for parties exporting universal wastes to have notice and an opportunity to assert CBI claims prior to disclosure of universal waste NOIs.

Could EPA address CBI concerns in a way that allowed publication of pending NOIs? Obviously EPA does not consider CBI concerns sufficient to prohibit the publication of the type of summary information it makes available regarding NOIs for export to non-OECD countries. It is unlikely that the requirements of the international agreements impose a greater barrier than FOIA.

EPA could also shorten the process of asserting CBI claims. EPA currently requires that persons submitting a NOI under Subpart E assert any CBI at the time of submission. EPA should obviously amend this rule to require persons submitting a NOI under the universal waste rules to also assert a claim at the time of submission. Further, under the OECD Decision and EPA’s Subpart H regulations, information from the receiving facility must be submitted prior to export, and EPA could amend 40 C.F.R. section 260.2(b) to provide than any receiving facility also waives confidentiality if not asserted at the time of submission of the NOI.

Most significantly, the limited data that would need to be published to provide sufficient public information regarding a pending NOI, such as the type of waste and the names of importing and transit countries, should not qualify as confidential business information or trade secrets.

C. Don’t Ratify Basel

As discussed above, ratification of the Basel Convention by the United States may require nothing more than filing of a notice with the

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454 40 C.F.R. § 260.2(b).
455 See, e.g., 40 C.F.R. § 273.
457 See 40 C.F.R. § 273 subpt. E.
458 See OECD Decision, supra note 62; 40 C.F.R. §§ 262.80–89.
Secretariat. There are also reasons to believe that all of the requirements of Basel could be adopted as domestic regulations under the current provisions of RCRA. The United States is thus in a position to join the international community as a party to Basel. But it shouldn’t. International control of the exports of hazardous waste from the United States to non-OECD countries may be better served by not ratifying Basel.

Under existing EPA regulations, all exports of hazardous waste to non-OECD countries are currently subject to notice and consent requirements. However, as a non-ratifying party to the Basel Convention, the export of hazardous wastes from the United States to those countries violates their obligations under Basel. In other words, as long as we do not ratify Basel, any export of hazardous waste to a non-OECD country should presumptively be a violation of legal obligations of the importing country.

To be sure, absent United States ratification, the export of hazardous waste in violation of Basel does not violate RCRA. Thus, at the moment, exports to non-OECD countries violate their laws, not ours, and there is no role for enforcement by the United States. But it is difficult to believe that the situation would be improved by the United States ratification of the treaty. Following ratification, even with adoption of a RCRA regulatory requirement that authorized exports only if managed in an “environmentally sound manner,” exports would presumptively be allowed and proof of violations would require a case-by-case assessment to determine if a given export complied with Basel requirements. Current e-wastes being sent for reclamation would not be any more effectively regulated if the United States ratifies Basel. If classified as a Subtitle C hazardous waste, they should now be subject to notice and consent requirements. If not classified as Subtitle C hazardous wastes, ratification of Basel will not ensure better regulation.

The current presumptive violation of Basel arising from the exports from the United States to other than an OECD country provides

459 Proposed Hazardous Waste Exports to Non-OECD Countries, supra note 235.
460 Ratification of Basel by the United States might, however, have implications on the ability of private parties to bring damage claims arising from improper disposal under the Alien Torts Claims Act (“ATCA”). The ATCA provides United States jurisdiction for private tort claims arising from violation of the “law of nations or a treaty of the United States.” 28 U.S.C. § 1350 (2006). There are arguments that the ATCA already applies if improper disposal is a violation of customary international law. See Raechel Anglin, International Environmental Law Gets Its Sea Legs: Hazardous Waste Dumping Claims Under the ATCA, 26 YALE L. & POL’Y REV. 231, 262 (2007).
461 Ratification of Basel would also do little to address the significant compliance problems associated with identifying exports that should be regulated as hazardous wastes.
462 Anglin, supra note 460, at 249.
certainty and at least the opportunity to use public pressure on the receiving country to decline to consent to the transaction. As discussed above, however, greater transparency in the process might help assure greater public pressure on importing countries to decline to offer affirmative consents to import.

CONCLUSION

EPA's complex set of regulations governing the export of hazardous waste creates a series of paradoxes. On the one hand, it appears that the export of materials that EPA acknowledges as hazardous waste is confined to OECD countries. Thus, many of the most contentious issues regarding trade in hazardous waste with less developed countries may be moot. On the other hand, EPA's inadequate handling of the hazardous waste status of many e-wastes makes complacency about EPA's regulatory program ill-advised.

EPA's export regulations are both simple and complex. They are simple because most, but not all, materials that constitute Subtitle C hazardous wastes are subject to “notice and consent” requirements for export. They are complex because of the dizzying set of different regulations that EPA has promulgated to impose these requirements and the differing rationales that EPA has employed. EPA could do a better job of implementing and simplifying its existing requirements and particularly clarifying the hazardous waste status of e-wastes.

Further, EPA has also claimed authority to exempt materials from classification as a hazardous waste and thus immune from export controls. Curiously, through this same rationale, EPA has justified exempting domestic wastes from regulation while imposing export requirements.

Finally, RCRA itself creates a constitutional and statutory paradox. EPA both embraces and denies that it has authority to implement international agreements. The issue has inherent constitutional interest, but it also has environmental consequence. If Congress can provide domestic effect to any future international agreements, then EPA has authority fully to implement OECD Decisions and the Basel Convention. If Congress has not or cannot provide for the binding effect of future international agreements, then portions of section 3017 become meaningless and there are questions about the content of and procedures used to adopt EPA's export regulations.