



## Search Term Analysis: A Review of Queries to the EPA Search Feature

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### **Introduction**

EPA has launched the National Dialogue on Access to Environmental Information (“National Dialogue”), led by EPA’s Office of Environmental Information. This effort seeks to understand EPA’s audiences’ needs and preferences for environmental information and find ways to improve and enhance information access.

Much of this effort involves seeking information from and listening to the EPA audience and key stakeholders through multiple channels, including stakeholder listening sessions, online jam sessions and comment boards. This effort also has involved observing EPA audiences’ behavior regarding environmental information held by EPA. This report summarizes what EPA learned in a review of search terms entered on EPA’s website.

To investigate what people seek when they search the EPA website, EPA analyzed the search term queries that visitors to the website used since January 2007. EPA assessed the 100 most-searched queries for each month from January 2007 to March 2008. August 2007 results were omitted due to remarkably different data that was unexplained. For the remaining 14 months of results, search queries were compared and similar terms were summed together, resulting in a list of the top 300 search terms over this time span.

### **Search Term Analysis Findings**

The top search terms were categorized into overlapping groups. The search terms were also broken down by topic area, information format and EPA Program Office. The following findings summarize the overall results of the analysis. Examples of topic areas, information format and program office are given where necessary.

*Users accessing the EPA website are searching for a broad array of information.* As shown in Table 1, users of the EPA search function sought a variety of information on diverse environmental topics. Search topics ranged from environmental issues prevalent in the media, such as global climate change, to topics likely related to individual user’s needs, such as automobiles.

**Table 1. Total Searches by Category Reference**

<b>Search Term Category</b>	<b>Total Searches</b>
Toxins & Pollutants (e.g., lead, radon)	209,801
Regulations (e.g., Clean Air Act)	168,952
Household (e.g., radon remediation)	88,828
Environmental Problem (e.g., pollution, acid rain)	53,142
Global Climate Change	45,520
Automobile (e.g., mpg, gas mileage)	21,897
Jobs (e.g., careers at EPA)	18,252
Fuel (e.g., ethanol)	1,2580
Recycling	7705
Acid Rain	7622
Grants	6945
EPA Regions	6664
Landfills	6382
Emergency Planning	5785
Energy Star	4753
Noise	2613
Soils	2514

**Website Users are Interested in Information Available through Multiple EPA Programs.** Table 2 shows that EPA website users search for topics that span EPA’s main program areas. This finding shows that users consider the agency to be a conduit for environmental information in a variety of topic areas.

**Table 2. Total Searches by EPA Program References**

<b>EPA Program Referenced by Search Term</b>	<b>Total Searches</b>
Air (e.g., Clean Air Act)	105,614
Waste (e.g., brownfields)	103,895
Water (e.g., watersheds, drinking water)	103,471
Land (e.g., landfills)	51,536
Administrative (e.g., forms)	41,593
Pesticides	9322

**Users Search for Multiple Information Formats on the EPA Website, although Methods Searches Rank Significantly Higher than Other Format Searches.** As shown in Table 3, EPA website users access the website in search of information in many formats. Overall however, users seem to locate information on methods more often than other information formats. One interpretation of this pattern is that EPA is considered to be a key source of technical methods for environmental monitoring and research.

**Table 3. Total Searches by Format Reference**

<b>Format Referenced in Search Term</b>	<b>Total Searches</b>
Methods (e.g., toxicological methods)	37,979
Forms	10,442
Maps	8283
Section (of a document)	8102
Permits	8096
Grants	6945
Research Models	3658
Certifications	3359
Publications	2772
Software	1893
Phone Contacts	1738