

EPA might be withholding pollution data

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The Society of Environmental Journalists says the U.S EPA is apparently withholding data on chemical pollution caused by Hurricane Katrina.

The SEJ said Monday it has been more than a week since the New Orleans Times-Picayune submitted a federal Freedom of Information Act request to determine what and how many dangerous chemicals have leaked into the environment as a result of Katrina?

The paper's lead hurricane reporter, Mark Schleifstein, said he has repeatedly asked for information from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, but his requests have been ignored.

The federal government's compliance with FOIA began to deteriorate in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, according to an SEJ report -- "A Flawed Tool -- Environmental Reporters' Experiences with the Freedom of Information Act" -- released Monday.

The organization says governmental excessive delays in releasing information are now common, with some FOIA requests taking more than a year to be answered. And even when requested documents are released, agencies frequently delete huge amounts of information.

The SEJ said several reporters, in addition to Schleifstein, are also seeking information from the EPA regarding dangerous chemical spills caused by Katrina.

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