

Critics fault closure of federal libraries

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The closing of six federal libraries has created alarm among the public and U.S. scientists, who say vital data will no longer be accessible.

Critics of the downsizing -- which federal officials said was a cost-savings measure -- say scientists and ordinary citizens would lose access to research materials crucial to scientific investigation and regulatory enforcement, the Los Angeles Times reported Friday.

Government officials respond that the cutbacks in hours, staffing and facilities were driven by tight budgets, lower facility patronage and higher online services demands. Leaner and more efficient operations would allow essential functions to be maintained.

While hundreds of federal libraries remain open, opponents said the reductions, especially at the Environmental Protection Agency, will hamper work of regulators and scientists dependent on librarians and reference materials not online, the Times said.

"Crucial information generated with taxpayer dollars is now not available to the public and the scientists who need it," said Emily Sheketoff of the American Library Association's Washington office. "This is the beginning of the elimination of all these government libraries. I think you have an administration that does not have a commitment to access to information."

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