

Federal Information: Slowing the Flow. Much of the news from Washington has concentrated on dramatic budget cut proposals in grant programs. However, there is another trend at the federal level with results equally if not more disturbing to libraries and their users--restrictions on government publication and information dissemination activities. These restrictions are due to a combination of specific policy decisions, the Administration's interpretation and implementation of the 1980 Paperwork Reduction Act (PL 96-511), and agency budget cuts.

In a climate in which government information activities are considered unnecessary frills, it is not surprising that publication and dissemination activities are the first to go when agencies are faced with severe budget cuts. What follows is only a partial chronology of an emerging pattern of restricting citizen access to government information.

Publication Moratorium. In April, 1981, President Reagan imposed a moratorium on the production and procurement of new audiovisual aids and continuing publications. The Office of Management and Budget followed up with Bulletin No. 81-16, "Elimination of Wasteful Spending on Government Periodicals, Pamphlets, and Audiovisual Products," and a model control plan. In October the OMB issued a supplement to Bulletin 81-16, which requires agency resubmission and rejustification of all existing periodicals and recurring pamphlets.

By year's end an estimated 900 government publications had been eliminated. One serial affected is the Securities and Exchange Commission's News Digest. The SEC will continue to print it for internal use, but will no longer offer subscriptions or make it available for depository library distribution. Instead, a private firm will publish it at a 50% increase in price (from \$100 to \$150 per year). A reference collection standby, the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, is threatened because 87 of the 97 remaining jobs in the Labor Department's occupational analysis division are being eliminated. Because of budget cuts the Agriculture Department's Economic Research Service will discontinue free distribution of its publications and make these reports available only on a paid subscription basis.

Government Statistics. The future of the unit which coordinates over 70 statistical programs run by federal agencies is in doubt under an internal OMB reorganization. Budget cuts have ended numerous Census Bureau studies and forced publication of much of the 1980 census on microfiche rather than paper. Bureau of Labor Statistics programs have been cut so much that business leaders protested at a March congressional hearing. Library statistics are collected and published less often at the National Center for Education Statistics.

Freedom of Information Act Restrictions. Last October the Administration submitted to Congress a proposal to severely limit the applicability of the Freedom of Information Act. A somewhat modified but still restrictive version of this proposal has been approved by a Senate subcommittee. On April 2 the President signed an executive order broadening the reasons for classifying information on grounds of national security. The new order eliminates the existing "identifiable harm" standard, thus weakening the public's ability to sue successfully for release of improperly classified documents under the Freedom of Information Act.