

WHAT TRIGGERS NEPA? Any major federal action that may significantly affect the quality of the human and natural environment requires analysis. For the U.S. Air Force, a major change may include changes of aircraft, reconfiguration of airspace, construction and/or renovation of facilities, range activities, exercises, or real estate actions.

WHEN DOES EIAP/NEPA BEGIN? It begins early in the planning process for a proposed action. Air Force EIAP responsibilities start when adequate information is known about a proposal to allow an estimate of its effects on the environment. The earlier the potential impacts are identified, the easier it is to refine the proposed action and alternatives to avoid or lessen the effects.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF NEPA DOCUMENTATION? Three levels of NEPA documents exist: categorical exclusion, environmental assessment, and environmental impact statement. When the action requires EIAP/NEPA the Air Force evaluates the proposal in one of three ways:

1. Is it a continuation of normal or routine activities?
2. If not routine, could the action present any potential affects to the environment?
3. Could the action present any significant impacts or be controversial in nature?

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION (CATEX)

A CATEX applies to those actions that do not individually or cumulatively have the potential for significant environmental effects and do not require further analysis. Typically, activities that qualify for a CATEX are normal and routine. AFI 32-7061 lists 38 activities (e.g., repairing and replacing real property installed equipment; routine increases and decreases in personnel; temporary increases in air operations; and supersonic flight operations over land and above 30,000 feet mean sea level) that are categorically excluded absent unique circumstances.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT (EA) AND FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)

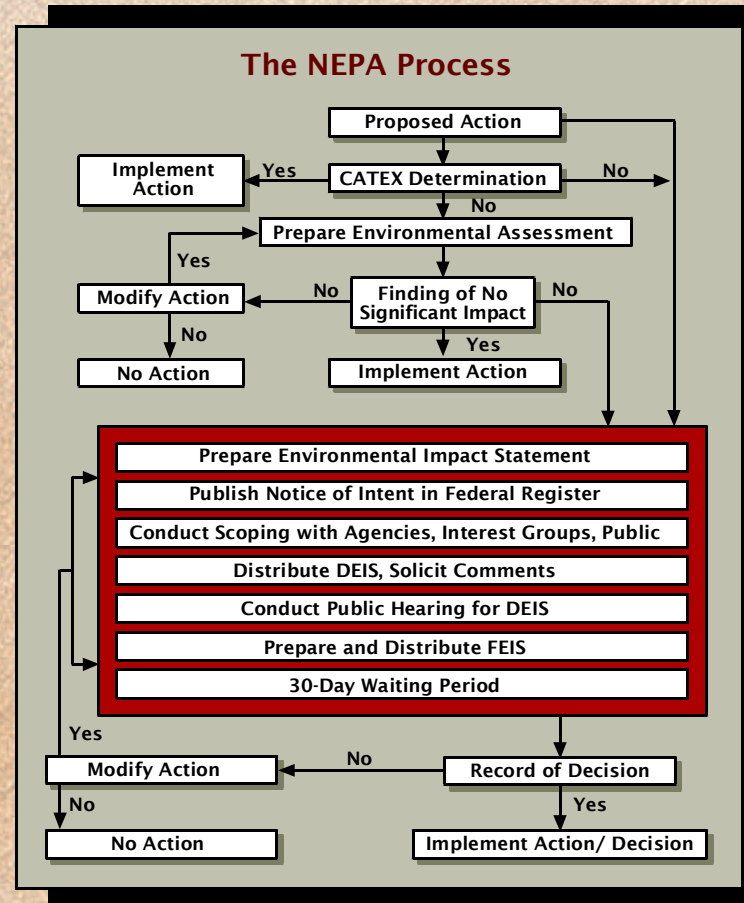
If a CATEX cannot be applied and it is unknown whether an Environmental Impact Statement is required, the Air Force prepares an EA. An EA is a concise, public document that determines if an action would result in significant impacts. An EA results in one of the following outcomes:

1. A Finding of No Significant Impact,
2. Preparation of an EIS, or
3. No action is taken.



Environmental Assessment continued

When an EA results in no significant impact, a FONSI (32 CFR 989.15) summarizes the findings and describes why an action would not require preparation of an EIS. The FONSI is signed before the action is implemented.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS) AND RECORD OF DECISION (ROD)

An EIS is the most intensive level of analysis and is prepared for actions having a potential for significant environmental impacts. The decision to prepare an EIS can be made early in the planning process or following preparation of an EA where the analysis shows the potential for significant impacts.

Actions such as new weapon systems beddowns, major aircraft realignments, land withdrawals greater than 5,000 acres, establishment of training ranges, and creation of supersonic airspace typically require preparation of an EIS.



Environmental Impact Statement continued

In general, an EIS contains:

- ✓ detailed explanation of the purpose and need for the action
- ✓ a thorough description of the proposed action, no action and reasonable alternatives
- ✓ identification of the resources affected by the proposal
- ✓ full description of the affected environment
- ✓ rigorous analysis of the potential impacts on affected resources
- ✓ cumulative impact analysis for past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions
- ✓ permitting requirements
- ✓ agency consultation information
- ✓ public involvement overview
- ✓ defined mitigation and management actions not already included in the proposed action or alternatives

An EIS is focused and issue-driven rather than encyclopedic. It provides the public and the decision maker an adequate level of information about the potential impacts of the action prior to making a decision.

A ROD serves as a public record documenting the Air Force decision. The ROD provides:

- ✓ Explanation of the decision
- ✓ Description of alternatives considered
- ✓ identification of both the preferred and environmentally preferred alternatives
- ✓ Factors considered in making the decision
- ✓ Statement on whether practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the selected alternative have been adopted
- ✓ Summary of any applicable monitoring and enforcement program for mitigation

Overall, the ROD summarizes the major factors weighed in making the decision, including essential considerations of national policy.

