

Accessing Public Sector Environmental Data & Information: Development & Demonstration of a National Portal

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Abstract

This paper highlights the importance that the Environment Agency places on the provision of information and the key part it plays in achieving environmental goals. Our vision is environmental information freely available to all – quickly and easily, where and when people want it, and in formats to meet particular needs. The Agency's track-record in this field is already considerable, with 4 years experience of providing key environmental datasets through 'What's in Your Backyard?' - a GIS, internet based national portal. Through this, members of the public can find information from a national level, right down to their local environment: locating areas of interest by postcode or place name, displaying data to a chosen scale, formulating individual queries, gaining background information interest, and downloading data.

The key components in establishing such services are people, data and technical infrastructure. The Agency has developed a conceptual architecture within which these components can be effectively managed and brought to bear. This is a challenging task within large administrations where data collection, management and storage are widely distributed both geographically and organisationally.

Future development must be more than simply making more information available in an electronic format. We are now improving the flexibility and response of the services we provide, including the development of highly tailored information services. Information must be made relevant to particular needs at particular times. Citizens must be made aware of the wider environmental impacts of their consumer choices and the implications to themselves and others. They must also understand the real effect of the environment on their daily lives and why it is in their interest to be interested.

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