

UNDERSTANDING THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as the body responsible for the management, conservation, protection and improvement of Guyana's natural environment is required to ensure that any developmental activity which may cause an adverse effect on the environment be assessed before such activity is commenced.

It is important to note that environmental assessments may take several forms. Therefore, the type of environmental assessment required for a particular activity is decided by determining the significance of the impacts of the activity on the environment.

When an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required?

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is an evaluation of the environmental and socio-economic impacts likely to arise from a major project. It is the process of identifying, predicting, evaluating and mitigating the biophysical, social, and other relevant effects of development proposals prior to major decisions being taken and commitments made for providing authorisation.

There is a common misconception that the EPA should require an EIA for all projects or developmental activities. However, pursuant to Section 11(2) of the Environmental Protection Act, Cap 20:05, Laws of Guyana (EP Act), only projects which may significantly affect the environment will require an EIA.

A decision by the Agency to require an EIA will therefore depend on the environmental information available to the Agency, and whether the environmental impacts are minimal, reversible and capable of being mitigated.

What are some areas covered by an EIA?

The EIA should be able to identify, describe, and evaluate the direct and indirect effects of the proposed project on the environment including:

- Impacts on human beings;
- Impacts on plants, animals, species, and habitat;
- Impacts of soil composition and integrity;
- Impacts on water quality;
- Impacts on air and climatic factors;
- Impacts on cultural heritage, material assessment and the landscape;
- Impacts on the natural resources etc.

An important component of the EIA is an outline of the main alternatives studied by the developer, and an indication of the main reasons for his/her choice, taking into account the environmental factors.

EIAs are NOT CONDUCTED by the EPA. It is conducted by independent and suitably qualified persons who have been approved by the EPA.

Other forms of environmental assessments

The EPA has the power to request other forms of assessments. The EPA can require an assessment of the cumulative effects of certain activities pursuant to Section 17 of the EP Act, or an Environmental Management Plan, an Ecosystem Assessment, a Vulnerability Assessment, or such other form of information as may be necessary pursuant to Regulation 3 and 17 of the Environmental Protection (Authorisations) Regulations.

Not all projects require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

There are some proposed projects whose impacts on the environment can be so significant that in accordance with section 11(2) of the EP Act, an EIA will be required.

However, some projects, although they may be considered as large-scale projects, may require a less rigorous environmental assessment report such as an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) or a Cumulative Impact Assessment (CIA).

In instances where an EIA is not required for seemingly large-scale projects, it simply mean that:

- The EPA has sufficient environmental information in its database;
- The possible impacts are known and capable of being sufficiently mitigated; or
- Potential environmental impacts are minimal or reversible.

EIA not required does not mean the project is approved.

The decision that an EIA is not required is an initial step in the authorisation process.

The decision as to whether a project is approved or rejected is made after further considerations, such as submissions made by the public, are taken into account.

You can share your ideas and questions by sending letters to: “Our Earth, Our Environment”, C/O Communications, Environmental Protection Agency, Ganges Street, Sophia, GEORGETOWN, or email us at: eit.epaguyana@gmail.com. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram and subscribe to our YouTube channel.