Strategies for Reading Environmental Impact Statements

An Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Report (EIR) is a written summary of an environmental impact assessment. An assessment is required when a new project (factory, development, construction) might have an impact on environmental or human health. In some cases, an EIS is made before cleaning up a polluted site, to see if the cleanup itself would put anyone at risk.

An EIS answers the question, "If this proposed project goes forward, how could it affect the environment and/or public health?" It will *not* answer the political question, "Should this project be allowed to proceed?"

Typical Sections

Select a typical page or two from each of the following sections, if available:

1. Introduction explaining why the project is being proposed
2. Description of the places that might be affected
3. Variety of alternatives for implementing the project. One should be a "No Action" alternative, predicting impacts if things were left as-is. This is used as a baseline for comparing the other alternatives.
4. Analysis of the environmental impacts of each of the alternatives, including things like:
- impacts to threatened or endangered species
- impacts on air and water quality
- impacts to historic and cultural sites
- social and economic impacts on local communities
- cost analysis for each alternative, including costs to mitigate expected impacts
5. Optional or Additional Sections:
- Evidence of funding for the complete project
- Proposed environmental mitigation plans, if the preferred alternative will cause significant impact

Categories of Questions & Observations

On the right are typical categories into which questions and observations can be grouped.

An example is given for each, but you don't need to write the example on the posted paper. Just the category will do.

Definitions & Chemical Properties

> What is PM_{10}? How dangerous is it?

Predictions

> How much PM_{10} will the new factory create?

Health Risks

> Will that PM_{10} trigger my kids' asthma?

The Study Process

> How did they decide how much PM_{10} there might be?

Action Needed

> Should we dispute this? On what grounds?

Other Questions or Observations