

# EPA Announces Shutdown of Online Archives

By Elena Hight

Less than a year after Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan declared his wish for the EPA to operate “in a ‘fishbowl’ once again,” the agency has decided to close or “sunset” its online archive. The archive hosts digital records of EPA resources, policy changes, regulatory actions, enforcement, and compliance dating back to the 1990s, and it is a vital resource for communities, activist groups, researchers, historians, and citizens.

Although far from perfect, the archive contains reports on thousands of sites within the United States, and it is a rich source of data that individuals can use to better understand the government’s response to a myriad of environmental issues. The closure of this archive signals the abandonment of transparency and the expressed values of administrator Regan.

Activists and environmental organizations have condemned the decision. In a June 13 open letter to the EPA from the Environmental Governance and Data Initiative, the EGDI wrote, “Overall, the lack of transparency in the decision to sunset the EPA’s archive is at odds with the EPA’s commitment to openness.” And, the group added, the closure leaves both the public and federal government “dependent upon third-party non-governmental organizations” to maintain records, groups that are not bound by “federal data integrity and provenance policies.” The EGDI letter is co-signed by 20 other organizations, including the Union of Concerned Scientists, the Internet Archive, and the Sierra Club.

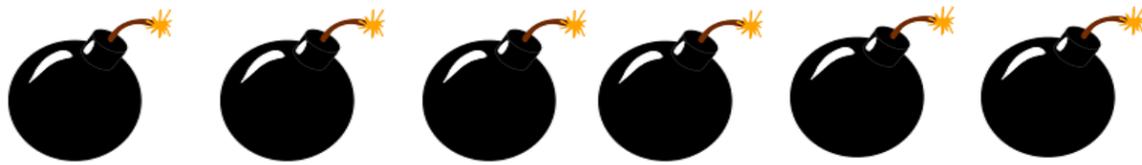
While public pressure caused the EPA to delay archive closure for a year, until July 2023, it is still unclear exactly why the EPA wants to shutter its archive instead of making it more accessible and user-friendly. In an email statement to The Verge, the EPA claims that the site’s infrastructure is outdated and that it is no longer “cost-effective.” The agency also said that the public could still access archive material through Freedom of Information Act requests and that most EPA documents will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis for submission to the National Archives and Records Administration. However, these claims are widely criticized, as both means of accessing EPA materials can be time-consuming, confusing, and costly.

The EPA archives have already proven to be essential in places like Camp Lejeune, North Carolina where residents used the online repository to better understand the government’s response to the military’s contamination of surrounding land and water, as well as their own exposure to toxic chemicals. In an era in which the Supreme Court is hampering the government’s ability to regulate pollution and toxic exposure, the archives are also a vital source of information about threatened federal programs. Despite problems with the current archive, it is clear that its closure will result in greater barriers to access, especially, as the American Society for Environmental History notes, among “more marginalized and environmental justice communities.”

While the delay of the archive’s closure was a short-term victory for environmental groups, the EPA has not publicized next steps for the archive. The Internet Archive and other sites like the Policy Commons are continuing to save tens of thousands of documents from the EPA website. Yet both systems have downsides and are not replacements for free and easily-accessible documents through government agencies. As Gretchen Gehrke, co-founder of EGDI, wrote on March 19, “EPA’s archive could become a model of web governance that fosters democratic oversight. Shuttering the archive is moving backwards and is a disservice to the public.”

As we move into an age of greater threats to environmental governance, the EPA should keep the archive open, improve its functionality, and maintain its commitment to transparency and democratic engagement.

— *Elena Hight is a writer, educator, activist, and PhD candidate in sociology based in Oklahoma City.*



## Costs Rise Past \$9 Billion for First of 12 Nuclear Missile Submarines Set to Replace Trident

The Navy’s new *Columbia* class long-range nuclear missile submarines, costing over \$9 billion each, are set to replace the current *Trident* submarine fleet which the Navy plans to retire starting in 2027. The Defense Acquisition Board has approved building 12 of the new nuclear weapons “platforms,” each with 16 Trident II D5 missiles which can carry 5 to 8 warheads. Construction of the first so-called “boomer,” the *USS District of Columbia*, began June 4, Bloomberg reported. According to the Government Accounting Office, the overall cost of the 12-boat program has blown past initial estimates by \$3.4 billion, to a projected \$112 billion. The first *Columbia* could be launched in 2031, and the Navy plans the fleet to operate until 2084.

### Columbia Program Performance (fiscal year 2022 dollars in millions)

	First full estimate (1/2017)	Latest (2/2021)	Percent increase
Development	\$13,814 [\$13.8 billion]	\$14,232 [\$14.2 billion]	+3.0%
Procurement	\$95,485 [\$95.5 billion]	\$97,684 [\$97.7 billion]	+2.3%
Unit cost	\$ 9,121 [\$ 9.1 billion]	\$ 9,355 [\$ 9.3 billion]	+2.6%
Boats in class	12	12	

— Source: Government Accounting Office: <<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-105230.pdf>>

## Military Spending: \$87 Million-Per-Hour in 2023

By Matthew Jahnke

In March, the Biden Administration submitted an \$813.3 billion military budget request for fiscal year 2023, \$773 billion of which would be allocated to the Pentagon. This figure does not include non-Pentagon military spending outlined below. A total of \$50.9 billion of the bill is earmarked for nuclear weapons, with \$34.4 billion going to the Department of Defense (DOD), and \$16.5 billion going to the National Nuclear Security Administration inside the Department of Energy.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has said that the nuclear weapons budget will be used to “modernize” the so-called nuclear “triad” — nuclear weapons on land-based missiles, warplanes, and submarines. The request included \$6.2 billion for the Navy’s *Columbia* class nuclear missile submarines; about \$9.5 billion dollars to be shared among the Air Force’s B-21 “Raider” heavy bomber, the long-range stand-off weapons system, and the Sentinel long-range, land-based missile system set to replace today’s Minuteman III missiles.

Despite the significant increases, it does appear that some nuclear weapons programs will be zeroed out. The nuclear-armed, sea-launched cruise missile system appears devoid of funding in the proposed budget. The same fate befalls the 1-megaton B83 gravity bomb — with 66 times the force of the US Army Air Corps’ Hiroshima bomb that promptly

killed 140,000 people. Although the previous administration planned a 2025 retirement date, it now appears the B83 will be phased out earlier.

Ultimately, on June 22, the House Appropriations Committee approved a 2023 Pentagon spending bill of \$761.681 billion, which is an increase of \$32 billion or 4.4%, over fiscal year 2022, and translate to an eye-popping \$87 million-per-hour! Military hawks in the Pentagon and Congress promoted the spending increases by catastrophizing Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, manufacturing “domino effect” propaganda about Russia’s imperial goals, and stirring up fears of China’s “modernization.”

As always, tens of billions in additional military spending is hidden in officially “civilian” programs. The 2022 fiscal year included at least another \$182 billion of non-Pentagon military spending, specifically in allocations to Homeland Security, NASA, retiree pay and healthcare, the Justice Department, the FBI, the State Department, International Security Assistance, the Treasury, and the Secret Service. In addition, the *Washington Post* has reported that the CIA’s “black budget” amounted to about \$52 billion in 2013, and the military portion of its current budget is unknown. (With a grand total of \$995.861 billion for next year, the US military all tolled is set to take in \$113 million every hour of every day.)

— *Matt Jahnke is a published biologist and Nuke-watch volunteer based in Duluth, Minnesota.*

## Deterrencelessness

Continued from first page

“This exposes the argumentation of the German government, which repeatedly claims that nuclear sharing is an important part of NATO’s deterrence strategy. In fact, maintaining it, and thus also the Büchel nuclear weapons site, is pure symbolic politics, albeit with high risks for the population. Therefore: The suspension of nuclear sharing must become a phase-out, [and] now would be a good opportunity to do so,” Vogler said last year.

### Proven useless, nuclear weapons can now be discarded

The June 30 NATO “concept” says, “The fundamental purpose of NATO’s nuclear capability is to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression.”

As of February 24, 2022, the NATO nuclear arsenal’s “fundamental purpose” has been utterly delegitimized, politically pulverized, and militarily reduced to paper. Its nuke arsenal can finally be removed without any loss of face, much less any loss of security.

NATO’s latest “concept” paper acknowledges the uselessness of retaining nuclear weapons in its admission that, “The strategic nuclear forces of the Al-

liance, particularly those of the United States, are the supreme guarantee of the security of the Alliance.” This is the terrible farce of nuclearism. If nuclear weapon threats guaranteed any security at all, none of the tens of billions of Euro-dollars’ worth of military training, weapons, mercenaries, cyber warfare, or intelligence assistance that NATO partners and Russia are now pouring into Ukraine would be necessary.

Rebecca Johnson, the founding president of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, told *Al Jazeera* at the end of the UN Review Conference for the Nonproliferation Treaty, “... when Russia has launched an invasion against Ukraine but also threatened the use of nuclear weapons ... deterrence has clearly failed.”

Nuclear-armed alliances are a thing of the past which must be, and now can be, abolished. Under the auspices of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, along with the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, international law provides a pathway, training wheels, guide rails and a motorcade — courtesy of the great majority of the world’s governments — to a world where conflict and even wars don’t endanger whole civilizations and the biological integrity of life on earth.

— *John LaForge*  
Fall 2022