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Ms. Brooke Dickson
Policy Analyst
Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
Office of Management and Budget
New Executive Office Building, Room 10236
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Ms. Dickson:

This letter provides a comment from the Department of Defense (DoD) research community on proposed Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidelines concerning the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information disseminated by Federal agencies (Federal Register; volume 66, page 34489; June 28, 2001). We appreciate that the OMB is required by law to issue these guidelines and commend the OMB for crafting a proposal that is a good first step on a very difficult issue. We wish to offer one comment from the perspective of a Federal agency that conducts research in its own Federal laboratories and also supports research through grants and contracts with non-Federal research institutions.

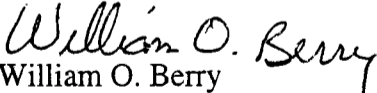
The comment concerns paragraph V.1.B.ii.a., which is in the section defining the standard for "quality," "utility," "objectivity," and "integrity." That paragraph suggests that scientific research information, to meet the standard, "must be substantially reproducible upon independent analysis of the underlying data." That standard makes sense for scientific information that an agency uses as a basis for regulation, which is the only example of agency-disseminated scientific information that is given in the Federal Register preamble accompanying the guidelines. It does not make sense for all scientific research information that agencies disseminate for other purposes, however. For example, Federally employed scientists and engineers in our in-house laboratories regularly publish papers in cutting-edge research areas, just as their colleagues in universities and other non-Federal research organizations do. The research enterprise works by having those publications serve as: (1) documentation of researchers' results and possible interpretations of those results, with caveats or areas of uncertainty noted; and (2) jumping-off points for other researchers' efforts to reproduce and build upon the results. The research community fully expects that a researcher's published results sometimes will prove difficult for others to reproduce, due to the fact that unique experimental conditions sometimes turn out to be a factor in giving a particular result. The science and engineering community learns from failures to reproduce results, just as they do from successes, and that advances the state of the art. It would delay science and engineering progress if researchers withheld publication and dissemination of results until reproduced by others, and the danger is that paragraph V.1.B.ii.a. will be interpreted to mean just that. Therefore, we recommend that the paragraph be amended as follows (add the underlined words): "a. With respect to scientific research information used as bases for agency regulatory actions, the results must be substantially



reproducible upon independent analysis of the underlying data." We agree that an agency should not use research results as a basis for regulatory action until there has been subsequent and independent confirmation of the results.

We appreciate this opportunity to comment on the proposed guidelines.

Sincerely,


William O. Berry
Director for Basic Research