

The Regulation that comes from Combination: The Effects of Combining Multiple Policy Areas within a Single Environmental Protection Agency in the States

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ABSTRACT

In twenty American states, regulatory environmental programs are combined with either public health or natural resource conservation programs. Natural resource conservation and public health agencies have historically embraced regulatory styles that rely less heavily on enforcement, while the Environmental Protection Agency cites enforcement actions, such as monetary penalties, as being pivotal to protecting the environment and public health. In this dissertation, I ask the following question: what regulatory style emerges from the combination of these differing preferences for the use of enforcement. Through in-depth case studies, interviews with environmental agency workers, and time-series analyses on enforcement actions, I find that the choice to nest regulatory environmental programs within preexisting natural resource conservation and public health agencies helps to maintain an anti-enforcement agency culture that is inherent within natural resource and public health agencies. This anti-enforcement culture affects how agency workers think about enforcement actions. And, as a result, combined agencies categorize less violations as severe and penalize violators less than independent pollution control agencies. This is especially the case for those agencies where natural resource conservation and environmental protection are combined. In these agencies, the effect of the combined structure persists, even when other traditional predictors of regulatory behavior are considered, including the states' environmental ideology and the partisanship of state legislatures and governors.

