Locating Government Documents

A government document contains information published in various formats at government expense by or for a government agency. A good place to start searching for government documents is the FirstGov website OR through a search engine like Google, that has an ADVANCED search feature so you can limit your search results to sites ending in “.gov”

SUDOC Numbers

All federal documents have a “Sudoc” number, which is a number assigned by the Superintendent of Documents in the Government Printing Office (GPO). The first few digits of the “Sudoc” number refer to its issuing agency so that all the publications issued by a particular agency are stored together. These documents are indexed in the Monthly Catalog with their full text housed in ‘depository libraries throughout the United States, including Middlebury College and the University of Vermont.

Monthly Catalog

The Catalog of United States Government Publications indexes print and electronic Government information documents by author, title, subject and title/keyword. The results are in the form of a monthly catalog entry number (i.e., 92-1348). This index goes from January 1994 and updated daily; a print counterpart dates from 1895 and is available in most depository libraries. The Monthly Catalog is available on the Internet at the following Government website:
<http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/locators/cgp/index.html>

Federal Register & the Code of Federal Regulations

Regulations are how the government administers its laws. The U.S. government publishes proposed regulations in the Federal Register (daily, Monday through Friday). Each entry includes the text of a proposed regulation, an address to send written comments to, a deadline for those comments, and (occasionally) supplementary information. Once the deadline has passed, the agency reviews all comments and publishes the final version of the regulation. The final version is then published in the Federal Register with an effective date. These regulations are cumulated and codified under one of 50 subject titles in the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR). To find the title and section of the CFR once you’ve located the Federal Register citation, you search the Code of Federal Regulations.

Searching the Federal Register & Code of Federal Regulations

The Federal Register and the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) are searchable by keyword, agency, CFR citation, or date. Searches can be limited to final rules, proposed rules, notices, presidential documents, Sunshine Act meetings, reader aids, and corrections. Remember that phrases must by in quotes (e.g., “nuclear regulatory commission”) and Boolean connectors must
be in capitals (e.g., nicotine AND health). You will need to download and install Adobe Acrobat reader in order to view or print PDF versions of documents.

**Lexis-Nexis (GMC Library computers only)**

Once you have a Federal Register citation, you can search either the Code of Federal Regulations or use the Lexis-Nexis database on the Green Mountain College Library’s web page of databases. Select *Code of Federal Regulations* as your source material and search by full-text or citation. If this is not successful, go to the regulation itself in the Federal Register. At the beginning of the entry you will find listed the title and part where the final rules should be. To find regulations relating to a specific law, use the *Parallel Table of Authorities and Rules* of the CFR Index and Finding Aid.

**Parallel Table of Authorities and Rules**

The *Parallel Table of Authorities and Rules* has sections arranged by U.S. Code citation, Statutes-at-large citation, Public Law Number, Executive Orders, Directives, Memorandums, and Reorganizations Plans. The CFR Index refers you to the title and part where regulations can be found.

**Participation in Law Making**

It has been said that the laws we live by are only as good as those we appoint to uphold them. Beyond that, the regulations we live by are only as good as the intentions of those who execute them. If we believe naively that only those with the public good in mind participate in the rule making process then we are subject to their interpretation of such good. This holds in all fields, including the regulation of environmental affairs. For this reason, public participation in the rule making process is an integral part of U.S. environmental legislation. In order to be a participant you can examine the Federal Register for notices that solicit public participation in the environmental regulatory process. You can research an issue and add your comments into the public record.

Here’s how to go about it:

1. Scan the Federal Register in an area of regulation of your choosing.
2. Be sure to note the closing date so you’ll have enough time to do research.
3. Research the topic and resources that look at all sides of an issue.
4. Create a comment (with bibliographic support) to add to the public record.