

Articles in *EIA Today* by Colleen Blessing

EIA to Focus on Timeliness of Data Based on Customer Response

Thirty percent of respondents to EIA's customer satisfaction survey said they were either neutral or not satisfied with the timeliness of EIA's data, and this is an area which has been targeted for improvement in the agency. The survey, which was conducted on January 24 through January 26, was the first agency-wide customer satisfaction survey ever conducted. EIA staff interviewed 286 telephone customers representing diverse user groups that ranged from first-time callers to long-established customers of EIA information.

The responses showed that most of EIA's customers were satisfied or very satisfied with overall customer service (94 percent) and overall information quality (86 percent). However, when asked about their perception of the timeliness of EIA's data, 30 percent of the respondents were either neutral or not satisfied.

One part of EIA's customer satisfaction survey consisted of questions to which customers could respond in detail, yielding more insight into the customers' perceptions. Customers who said they were either neutral or not satisfied with EIA's products cited accessibility and/or timeliness of the data as not meeting their needs. "Sometimes the process takes longer than necessary because of a written request procedure," said one respondent. When asked to be more specific as to why he was dissatisfied with EIA's service, one respondent answered, "Data are accurate within constraints of methods available to EIA, but because they are not current, they are not always representing the current state of the industry." Another respondent simply said he would prefer to see the data more quickly. Although many of the customers want the data sooner, most customers would not be willing to forego the level of accuracy in order to get the information quickly. One respondent said, "I would rather have [the data] late than inaccurate."

In an effort to respond to the customers' requirements, EIA is improving its electronic dissemination capabilities. Projects such as the EIA Home Page, the Electronic Publishing System (EPUB), and the Energy Information Highway should help customers access EIA's data faster. By means of electronic dissemination, EIA was able to fax data from the *Weekly Coal Production* report directly to its customers who indicated that they would prefer to receive it in that manner. This revised procedure allows customers to receive the report each Friday, when it is ready, rather than on Monday or Tuesday of the following week through the mail. Similarly, EIA moved up the availability of the electronic version of the *Weekly Petroleum Status Report* by a full day, providing industry, the media, and the financial community with more timely information on petroleum supplies. EIA also made weekly data on propane supply available a day sooner. And, in response to the need for timely on-highway diesel fuel price data, EIA designed and implemented a telephone price survey (EIA-888) that provides U.S. and Petroleum Allocation for Defense (PAD) District-level prices. The prices are now available on the day they are collected. Many customers in the telephone survey indicated they were not aware of the extent of our electronic initiatives.

Customer Survey Helps EIA Understand Customers' Needs

In conjunction with the Department's "February is Customer Appreciation Month" campaign, EIA held its second annual Customer Survey Week, February 27-29. Volunteers surveyed EIA's telephone customers on their satisfaction with EIA's service and information quality. Last year, EIA surveyed 282 telephone customers; this year we talked with 264 customers. Results were used in strategic planning and resource decisionmaking.

The volunteers asked customers about their satisfaction with customer service attributes—ease of access, courtesy, familiarity with the information, understanding customer request, and promptness in responding—and information quality—availability, relevance, accuracy, comprehensiveness, and timeliness.

These surveys help us keep in touch with our customers and their changing information and service requirements. One important survey finding was that 79 percent of the customers who currently use EIA products said that earlier release of data that were 95 percent correct would meet their needs. Another interesting result is the increase in the percentage of customers who use electronic products or services. In 1996, 60 percent of the respondents reported using an EIA electronic product or service, while in 1995, 49 percent of the respondents said they had. Also, last year 69 percent of the respondents said they would want the paper copy even if the data they needed were available electronically; that figure dropped to 62 percent in 1996.

This year, 95 percent of the respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied with the overall customer service, and 91 percent were satisfied with the information quality. However, of the information quality attributes, timeliness was rated lower than the others. Seventy-three percent of the respondents said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the timeliness of the information, the same percentage as on the 1995 survey. One reason for the lack of change in this result, despite widespread efforts during 1995 to increase timeliness, is that this survey was conducted with telephone customers, a group that may not be fully aware of or capable of accessing the electronic data that are available earlier.