

# Construction and Future Development of the Environmental Impact Assessment Forum in CHINA

**Abstract:** Accompanied by the establishment of environmental impact assessment law and the development and improvement of construction industry information in nearly a decade, network Forum has become an important information resource platform and information exchange manner for EIA workers. The China Environmental Impact Assessment Forum, which is hosted by the Appraisal Center for Environmental and Engineering of Ministry of Environmental Protection, is a professional forum focused on environmental impact assessment. It has more than 17,000 professional members in China, and has become one of the most influential EIA professional forums. In addition to the general technical forum features, the China EIA Forum also has its own characteristics in its content and form. This paper will discuss the content setting, technical characteristics and information resources utilization of the EIA Forum, combine with the role of the EIA Forum in construction and development of the EIA industry information. Then, we propose the future development orientation of the EIA Forum, and the major development tasks and work contents.

**Keywords:** Environmental Impact Assessment, Forum building, Information resource

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a multi-disciplinary comprehensive field. With the rapid development of social and economic in China, the task of Environmental Assessment and Environmental Management is increasingly arduous. Base on the establishment of environmental impact assessment law and the development of industry information in nearly a decade, we urgently need to change, such as the traditional management methods, decision-making patterns and information exchange channels. Then, we need to improve the industry technological level and management decision-making level by using advanced information and network technology.

In recent years, according to the development of environmental information and network technology, the network has become an important means to obtain EIA information and resources. Online forums, for example, has also become an important information resource platform and most popular communicate way. The China Environmental Impact Assessment Forum (China EIA Forum, <http://www.china-eia.com/BBS>), hosted by the Appraisal Center for Environmental and Engineering of Ministry of Environmental Protection., was founded in March 2005, temporarily shut down for some reason in 2008, and opened again in September 2011. To date, there are more than 17,000 registered members in environmental area, and this forum is one of the most influential environmental impact assessment professional forum.

## 1. The content and characteristics of the China EIA Forum

### 1.1. China EIA Forum Content Settings

The EIA Forum board design focuses highlights professional and timeliness. Its current set of content has five large partition: EIA technical exchange area, information and data sharing area, vocational training and examination area, leisure area and forums service area. These five areas is divided again into

22 professional boards. Detailed, EIA technical exchange area constituted by industrial polluting project EIA exchange board, ecological impact project EIA exchange board, strategic environmental assessment exchange board, the EIA forecast technology and methods board, environmental acceptance and listing of verification board, the EIA assessment technology board, guidelines and standard applications board, and research projects and academic exchange board. Information and data sharing area includes industry information courier board, information sharing and exchange board, EIA tools software exchange board etc. EIA engineer exam and training board. The EIA forum not only provides platforms for information exchanges, but also has area to collect members' advices, and publish forum announcements.

## 1.2. China EIA Forum Characteristics

In addition to has features of general network technology forums, such as highly interactive, involving a wide, timeliness, the China EIA Forum also has its own characteristics:

*Professional targeted of technical exchange.* Firstly, the administrators and moderators of the EIA Forum are professional practitioners, even part of them are senior experts. They play guiding roles in aspects of the release and study of industry information, in the development of EIA technology, even in the development of the whole industry. Secondly, many registered users engage in the environmental impact assessment work for many years, and have very rich experience.

*Information timeliness and information feedback bottom-up.* Forum administrators and moderators timely release notices, documents and announcements related to the environmental impact assessment in the appropriate boards. Registered members can expand the discussion and suggestion on hot topics, then information will feedback through the forum administrators to the assessment center, even the Ministry of Environmental Protection.

*Wide range of topics discussed, professional of answers and replies.* To date, the forum theme post to 10166 articles, replies 80914 articles, and 124 articles average daily increase. The content of forum discussion involves the compilation basis, engineering analysis, predictive models, total pollutant emission control, technical assessment, qualification examination, and job training. Basically, every topic has related senior experts or users to patiently answer questions or provide help.

## 2. The role of the EIA Forum in EIA informatization construction

### 2.1. Achieve EIA technical discussion and provide technical aid

Technical discussion and mutual aid is one of the basic functions of the Forum. Under normal circumstances, we use Baidu, Google and other search engines to find information on the network. The EIA Forum provides another way to obtain more targeted answers, such as post a topic on forum. For example, questions about selection of the accurate standards or prediction mode, it is difficult to get practical and effective answer when directly search in the web. Relatively, through the forum for help, may find solve way of the problem easily. Because other members are likely to run into similar problems, or even standard preparers and application developers also registered in the EIA Forum. For example, there was member with question about calculation of Planning Environmental Impact Assessment sources

strength. The moderator soon reply and lists several common methods and selection recommendations. Another moderator engaged in the EIA software development for many years, also shared AERMOD prediction method of line source, ADMS(an eia mode software) parallel computing development and application experience.

## 2.2. Get information timeliness and timely feedback

Forum administrator are professional staff of Appraisal Center for Environment and Engineering of Environmental Protection Ministry, they often release the latest announcements, technology assessment and training messages in the forum. Forum members, who distributed throughout the country, also posted the environmental events to the forum in the first time. In addition, the forum also discussed the EIA information disclosure, public participation methods and other topics, many members expressed their opinions during the course of discussion. These opinions, to some extent, will serve as a basis for decision making of Appraisal Center for Environment and Engineering or even Environmental Protection Department.

## 2.3. Profession technique exchanging and experience sharing

In practical work, the EIA experience and expertise of members only exchange within a small range, but now they can communicate through the EIA Forum. In this way, they can both share their experiences and improve themselves in the process of discussion. For example, a member of technology exchange area developed an environmental impact assessment standard query system, and posted its download link address on the Forum. Then, other users provide suggestion for improvements, after using the trial software. Simultaneously, with their help the author can continue to improve the functionality of the software.

## 2.4. Conduct expert interviews and direct communication with experts

In order to better solve the specific problems encountered in the EIA work, the EIA Forum create a chance to communicate with senior experts face-to-face. We invited senior experts of assessment center to carry out “the activities of expert interviews” in 2012. The activity first inform experience and industry background of invited experts, then gather problems and sorted out by the forum administrators feedback to the experts, and finally release answer in the forum. Currently, the forum has invited Hu Xuehai and Wang Yi teacher respectively to carry out expert interview on aspects of the environmental impact assessment technique and method. The replies of experts combined with their experience, provide a lot of help for young EIA workers. The activities organized by the EIA Forum that not only can provide a opportunities to communicate face-to-face with the national assessment experts, but also allow the experts to learn common practical problem in the current practice of EIA.

# 3. Future prospects for the development of the EIA Forum

## 3.1. The future development positioning of the EIA Forum

*Establishing EIA industry information center and information window.* Through keep on introducing the latest technology and related foundation database of construction achievements, the forum mobilizes

the enthusiasm of members, to widely collect the latest release of the relevant policies, laws and regulations, the EIA technology, and related management requirements from different countries and regions. Then, the forum classifies and manages information scientifically, and provides functions as discussion, query and download. At the same time, through the discussion in the forum, allows the relevant departments to fully understand the problems in specific EIA work, and in a timely manner to amend, supplement and perfect the relevant norms and standards.

*Completing authoritative EIA technical support and service center.* Now, there are more than 1,170 EIA units and more than 40,000 EIA employees in China. It is impossible for them to proficient in all industries and professional, so they always encounter various problems in the actual work. With the new guidelines and new standards implemented, the requirements of the environmental impact assessment also updated. As the Forum maintenance agency, the assessment center provides technical support, and gives full play to the guiding role of EIA experts in the Forum building.

*Completing an EIA Resource Center.* On the one hand, the EIA resources center should have basic information of environmental evaluation such as digital maps, terrain data, meteorological data, hydrological data, and even monitoring data. On the other hand, it should also include the resources of the environmental impact report as the industry study reference, which can let the EIA report receiving more public review and expanding the scope of public participation.

*Building national EIA personnel exchanges Community.* Combined with the EIA related fields and practitioners' structure, expand the forum board design and function. Building the Forum into a learning space for the EIA new members, a technical exchange community for the EIA engineers, a micro-blog base for the EIA practitioners records, and a platform for other hobbies exchange (such as travel, photography, reading and so on).

### 3.2. The tasks of the EIA Forum in the next step development

Further expand the visibility and influence of the forum, and mobilize the enthusiasm of the users. Though registered users has reached 17,000, many of them are non-active users, there is a great development opportunities for the EIA Forum. In order to expand the influence of the Forum, we will development forum by following forms: (1) take the Boao Forum for example, organize essay and competitions, hold symposia, and use resources of EIA web ([www.china-eia.com](http://www.china-eia.com)) and 《Environmental Impact Assessment Dynamic》 to expanding the visibility and influence of the forum. (2) In conjunction with some other well-known folk EIA forum for cooperation, and make its own characteristics.

*Improve the level of technical exchange.* Hire experts review the content of the forum, to provide professional technical problem-oriented conclusion, in order to avoid incorrect discuss misleading users. At the same time, they organize symposium for guiding the public opinion, and provide opportunity for in-depth exchange. They publish some tutorial posts in the forum, organize network lectures and encourage fellow members to help the new members, members help each other and share experience, establishing a good platform to express views for EIA workers.

#### **4. Summary**

Because of the China EIA Forum's characteristics of rich and availability professional information and interactive exchange of information, it has got more and more attention and participation from EIA practitioners. We believe that through the efforts of the EIA workers and the support of assessment centers, Environmental Protection Ministry and other relevant departments, the China Environmental Impact Assessment Forum, the China Environmental Impact Assessment Network and the research and applications of the whole industry information will all be boomed.