

**Geology and Public Policy—What? Why? How? Local, State, and Regional Efforts,**  
John D. Kiefer, Kentucky Geological Survey, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY  
40506, kiefer@uky.edu

Geology and public policy seems well on its way to becoming one of those overused catch phrases. Perhaps the question should not be what and why, but why has it taken so long. The answer points right back to those of us that call ourselves geologists. In fact, approximately 30 states now have geology registration or certification laws on the books, meaning that by statute, we are part of public policy. Geology, or the broader earth science, plays a fundamental role in more than half of our public policy decisions. Unfortunately, we geologists have not done a good job of publicizing our science. We know how important it is, but we continue to whine and “preach to the choir” that people should be using geology in making intelligent decisions in the public interest. Unfortunately, we do very little to explain to others why it is important. To paraphrase a quote from Thomas Jefferson and used by Dr. Sharon Moser, a former Geological Society of America president in her presidential address, “Geology (science) is my passion, politics is my duty.” Is promoting geology as a contributor to public policy decisions also our duty as well as our passion? We tend to hide behind worn-out excuses. It takes too much time to get involved. I’m a scientist that presents unbiased facts, not a politician. If I present an unpopular view even though based on science, it may be unpopular and do more harm than good. Most of the decisions are political anyway, not scientific. They are all predetermined and made behind the scenes before the public gets any input. What do we really mean by geology in public policy? How can you get involved? Why get involved? Is it really important? What are the consequences of ignoring geology in policy decisions? Are we ever successful? Some examples: locating coal and petroleum resources, developing energy policies for the future, locating landfills, dealing with groundwater contamination, ensuring adequate water supplies, trying to mitigate flooding, locating sand and gravel and limestone aggregate, finding and using fossil fuels and strategic and critical mineral deposits, developing new subdivisions, shopping centers, and industrial parks in less desirable and geologically hazardous areas, mitigating earthquake loss. Make no mistake about it, the science of geology is critical to our survival on this planet, and making that known is critical to the survival of our science. Let’s look at some success stories, some failures, and finally, how you can become involved.