One equals dozens in world of appointments

By Mark Leslie

WASHINGTON, D.C. — When the Clinton Administration took over, more than one person moved into the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Carol Browner's entourage: dozens. Their effect: acute, for some.

Although 95 to 97 percent of what one administration does is identical to its predecessors, EPA golf liaison officer Mike Scott said the other 3 to 5 percent magnifies and makes the change in personnel seem huge. "There is a common myth that by the time this stuff filters down, the bureaucrats don't even notice," Scott said. "I don't know how that is in other agencies, but ... within our fairly cozy agency of only 18,000 people, I'm acutely aware of policy changes from one administration to the next. They influence things. They do an impact statement even, although I think that's true of most of the bureaucrats.

"Public Affairs is directly connected to the administrator, so I will notice more of that than most people. But, yes, the direction that an administrator can provide and the constant administrator for research and development wants for the science programs here will affect the daily operation of scientists.

When Browner moved into the EPA directorship, she was not alone as a presidential appointee there. A dozen presidential appointees moved into place, heading every program office — among them the Office of Air and Radiation, Pesticides and Toxics, Solid Waste, Water, Research and Development, Policy Planning, Congressional Affairs, Public Affairs, and State and Local Relations.

And each of those presidential appointees brought with them their immediate staffs, who are not presidential appointees but political appointees.

Known as "Schedule Cs," political appointees are people who probably worked on the campaign or were on somebody's congressional staff before being appointed.

"Add all those folks up, and a few presidentially appointed deputies under them, and you're well into the dozens for EPA alone," Scott said. "And they make their presence known.

How large a role does politics play in the Clinton Administration?

"Statements Carol Browner has made on chloroform and teflon pesticides have been very non-scientific, and with some other agenda," said Stuart Cohen, who worked for EPA for 11 years and is now president of Environmental & Turf Services, Inc., in Wheaton, Md. "They have been either based on poor science or no science. With regard to actions, I'm a little distressed that EPA seems to be putting more emphasis on being concerned about detections of pesticides in ground water, period, as opposed to detections of concentrations that might cause some problem.

"Cleanup on the surface water, I'm very pleased EPA is recognizing the important role that computer simulation modeling plays in risk assessment."

"The beginning of the Pesticide and Toxics Program is a pediatrician, Browner has appointed more scientists than most past administrators, Scott said. "Basically the agency has been run by scientists and attorneys — not surprising since those are the two key areas of EPA's work. By sheer mathematical probability, we would have had a few people from business. But, I'm hard put to think of anyone who has come to the EPA with a background in industry."

"It would be nice if we had some. And it's not just this administration."

Although Browner does not come out of the "science culture itself... she recognizes the importance of strong science and good data as one of her six major themes," said Dr. Don Barnes, executive secretary of the EPA's Scientific Advisory Board. "She's philosophically committed to good science."

He pointed to her appointment of Dr. Bob Huggett to the new post of assistant administrator for the Office of Marine Sciences at the College of William and Mary, Huggett has been a member of the SAB for several years.