



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
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Office of the Regional Administrator

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Administrator's Priorities

FROM: 
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Regional Administrator

TO: All EPA Region 6 Employees

Each time I meet Administrator Jackson, I am energized by her clear vision for the Agency and breadth of knowledge of our daily work. Last week, she outlined seven priorities for EPA's future, the key themes that will focus our work to protect human health and the environment for all Americans. Those priorities are:

- Taking Action on Climate Change
- Improving Air Quality
- Cleaning Up Our Communities
- Assuring the Safety of Chemicals
- Protecting America's Waters
- Expanding the Conversation on Environmentalism and Working for Environmental Justice
- Building Strong State and Tribal Partnerships

These seven priorities will impact the work of EPA's program areas and regional offices in different ways. As I read these priorities, it is clear to me that all of us are working in one way or another in one, two, or many of them. For our team in Region 6, it will mean strong support from Administrator Jackson in our major efforts, as she is clearly our strongest advocate.

I want to share my thoughts on how I am already seeing how our work fits into the Administrator's priorities. It is up to us to develop strategies that elevate these key priorities and ensure that they are part of our work each day.

Taking Action on Climate Change:

Last year saw historic progress in the fight against climate change, with a range of greenhouse gas initiatives, including the endangerment finding and mobile source greenhouse gas proposals. The five states which make up Region 6 will generate over 35% of the nation's greenhouse gases from industrial stacks, so we bear a special responsibility to be leaders on this critical issue. It is fitting that one of the first large scale power plants with fully-integrated carbon capture and sequestration is planned for West Texas and it is about to enter the permitting phase. Region 6 staff will be on the cutting edge of the scientific, engineering, and legal challenges that will undoubtedly come forward. I am especially excited about the opportunity to showcase our expertise in underground injection, and helping the world move forward with this essential method for addressing carbon emissions. Climate change also highlights the importance of our ongoing work to rebuild wetlands and prevent land loss in coastal Louisiana, and to create processes that protect the valuable water resources in the arid western parts of the region. We also clearly have a role in helping producers of cleaner energy such as natural gas and biofuels harvest this energy in the most protective way.

Improving Air Quality:

Air quality challenges are one of the surest reminders of both the economic benefits as well as environmental consequences of the high concentration of industrial, utility, and oil/gas production sources in the region. The national ambient air quality standards, the cornerstones of clean air efforts in the U.S., are in the middle of an unprecedented process of review that will likely strengthening of each and every ambient standard by 2011. Implementing these standards for high-profile pollutants like ozone and fine particulate is likely to involve a considerable amount of time by us and our state partners, but also spark innovation and foster new clean technology. The earliest beneficiaries of these clean air efforts will probably be the fenceline and roadside communities who are often the first exposed to the pre-cursor chemicals that eventually form the smog compounds we target with the NAAQS. In addition, we are engaged in Texas, through rulemakings and objections, in one of the most thorough examinations of a state's permitting program in the history of the Agency, a process which will have short-term and long-term benefits throughout the state.

Assuring the Safety of Chemicals:

Whether we are dealing with foreign imported drywall or formaldehyde in trailers, EPA and this Region in particular play an important role in helping assure the safety of chemicals. One of the Administrator's highest priorities is to work with Congress to reauthorize and modernize the Toxic Substances Control Act. As this work moves forward, new efforts focused on protecting the public at large from chemicals are likely to raise concerns about the workers, the families, and the communities near factories, farms, and incinerators where large volumes of chemicals are produced, used, or disposed. I am sure that we would all agree that the health of the people exposed to levels to toxins greatly above the national average is worthy of our focused attention. We also need be aware and responsive to evidence that comes forward about communities with potentially high exposures, including the blood benzene level data from Corpus Christi and the blood dioxin evidence from Mossville.

Cleaning Up Our Communities:

The Administrator is committed to strengthening our work to clean-up and revitalize communities, through the Superfund and Brownfields programs. Projects like Tar Creek, Molycorp, and the uranium mines in New Mexico are immense in size, but the progress already achieved in some projects is incredible. Cleaning up contaminated sites in the states and Indian Country and returning brownfields to productive use are two of the most visible kinds of projects that demonstrate to the public and our government partners the value that the Agency can have. The job training success of our Brownfields program adds additional benefits to the people we serve. In addition, in a region with such a large concentration of chemical production and mining activity, we have to implement the nation's best oversight of waste management, to prevent the contamination of tomorrow's communities, and hopefully, end the need for the Superfund program.

Protecting America's Waters:

The old adage "Water is for fighting and whiskey is for drinking" could not be truer for our cities and towns where drought conditions or poor water quality limits supply for agriculture, business, and people. Perhaps in no other region do the challenges of protecting watersheds, conserving water, and providing adequate supply and quality of drinking water come together like they do in Region 6. Nutrient loading from cities and non-point sources in the entire Mississippi River basin create Gulf hypoxia, and the Administrator is committed to moving forward with national nutrient control strategies. Our Region will play a critical role to demonstrate to upstream locations that nutrients in the river have serious consequences when those waters empty into the Gulf. The nexus of atmospheric and water protection is clear in our region, as efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are critical to protect the wetlands so vital to Louisiana's wildlife and economy. These efforts are also necessary to prevent the large reduction in precipitation that is predicted by climate models for West Texas and New Mexico. As a region with a rapidly growing population and several of the country's largest cities, initiatives to clean-up stormwater runoff and existing groundwater plumes, protect urban waters, and ensure the purity of drinking water will necessarily involve considerable time and resources by our Region 6 team and by the other region's governments. Our challenges are big, but the work is vital.

Expanding the Conversation on Environmentalism and Working for Environmental Justice:

It is essential that we include environmental justice principles in our decisions. We need to identify and stay engaged with community partners in our Superfund, brownfields, and air and water permits programs, expanding beyond our statutory obligations to provide notice and solicit public comments. We should take advantage of opportunities to satisfy the requirements of other programs - for example, the citing of new air quality monitoring stations, the locations of public hearings for water quality actions, and the establishment of regional enforcement priorities - by including historically underserved communities in these efforts in every way possible. Last month, we held community listening sessions as part of the National Brownfields Conference and later this month we have more listening sessions as part of the NEJAC meeting. We will take lessons learned from our EJ Showcase Community Project in Port Arthur to help us expand our community-based efforts in other places throughout the region.

Building Strong State and Tribal Partnerships:

EPA cannot do it alone. States, tribal nations, and local governments implement many important environmental programs, but growing populations and the requirements of new programs (like climate change and protection of waterways from nutrients) are likely to outpace available resources. It is important that we clearly communicate the Agency's priorities to those stakeholders helping us implement federal programs. In addition, we must identify those areas where EPA expertise and resources are needed to ensure environmental protection, and not let state, tribal, or local efforts fall below acceptable levels. We have to continue our investment of present-day resources to help the 66 Tribes in the region develop expertise in environmental management, a process which has already and will continue to produce long-term benefits to the citizens and air/land/water of those Nations.

As the Administrator said in her memo, "These priorities will guide our work in 2010 and the years ahead. They are built around the challenges and opportunities inherent in our mission to protect human health and the environment for all Americans."

I am honored to be part of the EPA team as we move forward in addressing these important priorities. These are exciting times at EPA, and as I am sure you have noticed, the pace of change is breathtaking. As we approach our Agency's 40th birthday in December, actions are underway to reform most of our nation's environmental laws, with new air, water, and RCRA standards, climate change regulations, water quality infrastructure improvements, and toxic chemical reform. I am certain it reminds our charter employees of the first days of EPA and brings a renewed excitement and commitment to all of us.