



January 30, 2012

The Honorable Lisa P. Jackson
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Ariel Rios Building
Washington, DC 20460

Dear EPA Administrator Jackson:

I am writing on behalf of the Ecology Center's more than 5,000 members and supporters in the State of Michigan to urge your Agency to at long last release the non-cancer portion of the Dioxin Reassessment.

Thank you for all that you have done to update the scientific basis for Agency decision-making related to dioxin. We applaud you for establishing a timeline for completion of what has been one of the longest reviews of a chemical in the nation's history. We thank you for your personal communication to our organization and others that finalizing the Dioxin Reassessment was a priority for your Agency.

As you know, dioxin is of critical interest to the residents of Michigan, because we host the nation's largest dioxin contamination site. Pregnant women, children, and families living in dioxin-contaminated areas have been exposed to this chemical for decades. Entire ecosystems including the food web are contaminated. People have been advised to limit exposure by adhering to recommendations – for instance - using air filter masks while mowing their lawn, limiting the consumption of wild game, fish and food from the contaminated region. Farmers are advised against growing many crops. More than 50 miles a river system in mid-Michigan, the largest watershed here, is contaminated by a chemical that impacts the lives of thousands of people and the economic vitality of the region.

These exposures have continued while the government has failed to finalize and provide an assessment of the full risks faced by these exposures. This failure has led to much confusion about the toxicity of the chemical (which we have detailed in previous letters to the Administrator), and has delayed critical action for both cleanup and prevention.

The failure to finalize the document until now represents a political, moral and ethical failure. Dioxin has become the textbook example of how industry can successfully delay science-based progress on toxic chemicals in this country. It has now been 27 years since the first draft was issued.

Industry arguments that the public will be confused if the document is released are disingenuous. It has been far more confusing to have no settled government policy on the issue. This failure to have a finalized assessment of the chemical has caused confusion at countless public hearings that I have attended.

The other industry arguments offered are equally refutable, and - when seen as part of a nearly three decade-long pattern of coming up with every possible complaint to delay progress - must be rejected.

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What is at stake is the reputation of the entire Agency, and the ability of the Agency to issue science-based documents even when they are unpopular with powerful regulated interests. If the Agency is unable to do this, after nearly 30 years, the competence and effectiveness of the Agency under this Administration is jeopardized, and the health of the public sacrificed.

EPA's approach to dioxin has been reviewed, updated and approved multiple times- by both the National Academy of Sciences and its own Science Advisory Board, with many opportunities for input. There is no defensible reason to delay the release any further.

Don't let the chemical and food industries delay for another generation a coherent and finalized approach to dioxin. The release of this information is a public health imperative, and will be a promise delivered to the public from the Agency. We urge you and the Administration to reject the latest wave of industry pressure to keep this report from the light of day. Please release the non-cancer portion of the Dioxin Reassessment by the end of this January and the cancer portion as quickly as possible thereafter.

Thank you for the EPA's efforts, in the face of considerable opposition, to improve public disclosure about the potential hazards of all chemicals, and in particular, for your efforts to bring science-based decision making to the Agency's work on dioxin.

Sincerely,

Tracey Easthope, MPH

Director, Environmental Health Project

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