

March 31, 2020

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

We write to express our opposition to the enforcement decision outlined in the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) March 26 memorandum announcing that the agency will cease all enforcement actions during the coronavirus pandemic. This suspension of enforcement during the ongoing COVID-19 health crisis is irresponsible and neglects the Agency's core mission to protect public health. Environmental protections are more important than ever as we face the spread of a severe respiratory illness that is making tens of thousands of Americans sick and straining the capacity of our hospitals and healthcare workforce.

Reports indicate that the EPA is broadly relaxing enforcement of environmental protections after receiving requests to do so from industry, in particular the oil and gas industry. The criteria pollutants commonly released by industrial activities, especially the fossil fuel industry, include carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur oxides, ozone, particulate matter, and lead. Exposure to these pollutants can have serious health consequences, such as trouble breathing, aggravated asthma, lung cancer, heart attack, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and premature death. The health impacts of these pollutants are well-established, and exposure is particularly dangerous for those with respiratory conditions. We are currently facing a severe respiratory pandemic, taking lives and hospitalizing thousands—at this moment, communities need more protections from toxic pollution, not less. Waiving environmental enforcement will only add to the severity of the COVID-19 crisis.

Equally alarming are the environmental justice implications of your decision. Members of frontline communities—including low-income communities, communities of color, and Tribal and indigenous communities—are already more exposed to pollution that can cause health problems, such as cancer and asthma, and often lack access to healthcare. Exacerbating these environmental threats only increases their vulnerability to this pandemic. Suspending enforcement will significantly increase the risk of death and hospitalization as these communities continue to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, we are very concerned about protections to water quality during this time, as oil and gas production, refining and other industrial activities can create significant amounts of toxic wastewater that must go through several stages of treatment before release. If not properly treated, then the water's rerelease can put critical water supplies, especially drinking water, at risk.

Your broad suspension of enforcement is unprecedented and dangerous, especially given the pandemic we face. While our doctors and nurses work urgently to keep people healthy and manage hospital overflows, you are granting polluting industries a free pass to contaminate our air and water, likely adding patients to healthcare providers' already overwhelming caseloads.

Industry operations that mitigate pollution are more important now than ever, and these companies need to treat pollution mitigation like the essential function that it is. We urge you to reverse your decision and take a more measured and appropriate approach to working with industries that maintains the EPA's mission to protect public health.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.



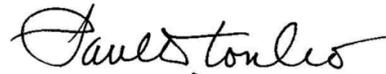
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