



Society of Environmental Journalists

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June 1, 2007

TO: Members of Senate Environment and Public Works Committee

Dear Senator:

The Society of Environmental Journalists urges you to support the Toxic Right-to-Know Protection Act (S. 595), which we expect soon to be brought up for consideration by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. We hope you will vote to order the bill reported favorably without amendments to the full Senate and vote for passage there.

The bill would restore the all-important ability of the U.S. public to be fully informed about potentially dangerous chemical exposures they may face. It would restore the news media's ability to inform them of those risks. It would reverse or prevent changes made to the Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) by the Environmental Protection Agency, which in our view would deprive the public of information they have a right to know.

The Society of Environmental Journalists (SEJ) is the world's largest and oldest organization of individual working journalists covering environmental issues. Founded in 1990, SEJ consists of some 1,300 journalists, educators and students dedicated to improving the quality, accuracy and visibility of environmental reporting. Working through its First Amendment Task Force and WatchDog Program, SEJ addresses freedom of information, right-to-know, and other news gathering issues of concern to journalists reporting on environmental topics.

S 595, and its identical companion bill HR 1055, would reverse EPA's recent change to the rules for reporting thresholds under the TRI program. Although EPA has claimed the agency is trying to reduce the burden on small business, the changes it seeks would actually not accomplish that. Small businesses would have to do the same amount of work anyway, to determine whether they fall below the new reporting thresholds. Small businesses under ten full-time employees and certain industry sectors are already exempted from TRI reporting requirements.

Public disclosure of toxic releases has been proven for nearly two decades to be a powerful incentive for facilities to undertake voluntary, non-regulatory reductions in the amounts of toxic materials they handle or release.

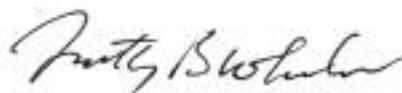
A recent GAO assessment determined that EPA's rule changes will have a significant impact on information available to the public, including more than 3,500 facilities across the country that would no longer need to report their toxic releases. The GAO also found that EPA violated its own rulemaking procedures and noted several problems with EPA's analysis justifying the changes.



In making its changes, EPA ignored the overwhelming opposition expressed on the regulatory record by over 120,000 citizens, 113 government agencies, and officials representing 23 states -- not to mention a May 2006 vote by the House of Representatives.

Again, we urge you to vote for approval of S 595.

Sincerely,



Timothy Wheeler, President
Society of Environmental Journalists

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