

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 19, 2017

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
United States Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Secretary Pruitt,

We write to you with concern for Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) preparedness for the impacts of increased extreme weather events like those that recently occurred in South Texas and the Southeast. In particular, we are concerned that efforts to reduce the Agency's staff and budget, along with plans to cut or eliminate climate mitigation and adaptation programs, will leave the Agency ill equipped to protect communities from the environmental hazards associated with extreme weather.

Recent reports in the news media have drawn attention to potential hazards to public health and local environmental integrity due to hurricane-related flooding at Superfund sites, chemical plants and refineries in areas affected by Hurricane Harvey. The rapid development of multiple hurricanes since, one of which was the record-breaking Irma, is an indicator of more threatening storms to come. We know that you have previously identified Superfund site cleanup as a key function of the Environmental Protection Agency and a priority for your time leading the EPA. We would like to know how you intend to prepare the Agency to deal with toxic superfund contamination and other hazards in light of increases in extreme weather.

As such, we ask that you respond to the following:

- Your recently developed Superfund plan does not address the issue of extreme weather. Under your leadership, how does the EPA plan to address the issue of superfund contamination under the threat of increasing extreme weather and natural disasters?
- What is your plan for securing other potentially hazardous sites under circumstances of extreme weather?

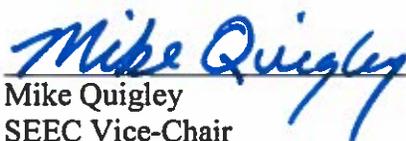
We also ask that you reconsider the delay of the EPA's Risk Management Plan rule. Had it been in place, it would have better protected the health of police officers and firefighters in Crosby, Texas as they were responding to chemical contamination and fires at the Arkema chemical plant. The rule creates increased transparency regarding the possibly dangerous chemicals present at plants like Arkema and would have helped first responders better understand the threats they faced during that incident.

While a ready response is critical, we cannot just plan for the aftermath of disasters. We must also do all we can to protect communities from them in the first place. In addition to causing sea levels to rise, climate change is projected to lead to stronger, more intense storms, such as hurricanes with higher wind speeds, heavier rainfall and more dangerous storm surge. That is why we are so concerned about efforts to cut or eliminate climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives that will help protect American communities, saving money and lives. Mitigation of climate change impacts through reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is a must for protecting communities. Investment in climate adaptation—the rebuilding of communities and infrastructure so they are better able to withstand extreme weather, flooding and other hazards, is equally important. According to the EPA’s own reporting, without adaptation, unmitigated climate change is projected to result in \$5.0 trillion in damages for coastal property alone in the contiguous U.S. through 2100. This is in addition to the even more important priority of protecting American lives and keeping people safe in their communities. We therefore ask that you reconsider the Administration’s proposals to cut, eliminate or rollback critical climate related initiatives and investments that can help protect communities from future storms.

Finally, we are concerned that the Trump Administration’s desire to dramatically reduce staff and the overall budget of EPA will impact the Agency’s ability to respond and protect communities after extreme weather events. Moreover, while the FY18 appropriations bill that passed the House included a modest increase for Superfund remediation, we find it worrying that the President’s budget proposed substantial cuts to this important program. In light of recent storms and wildfires, it is clear that EPA will be tasked with vital life-saving cleanup frequently and across the country, especially as the United States realizes more and more of the harmful impacts of climate change. It is important that EPA maintain the staffing and funding levels necessary to adequately respond to environmental challenges wherever and whenever it is needed, and to proactively prevent such dangers by cleaning up contaminated sites as aggressively as possible before disaster strikes.

We look forward to receiving the answers to the questions outlined above and to working with you to ensure the EPA is prepared to fulfil its responsibility to protect public health and the environment.

Sincerely,



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SEEC Vice-Chair
Member of Congress



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SEEC Co-Chair
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