

EPA CORE PROGRAMS – ENVIRONMENTAL ENFORCEMENT

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ESSENTIAL WORK AT RISK

For almost 50 years, dedicated EPA employees have worked daily to improve the quality of our air, water and land, protecting our health and the environment in ways we cannot take for granted. The next generation of emerging environmental and public threats is subtler and not always as visible to the public. Consider the implications if EPA is not provided adequate resources to perform its core functions.

Environmental Enforcement

President Richard Nixon created EPA in 1970 with the express purpose of establishing “an autonomous regulatory body to oversee the enforcement of environmental policy.” Far from being onerous, this has been a productive process to protect people’s health and the natural world, prevent pollution and support the responsible use of the land we share. To ensure that individuals and companies follow the rules, EPA takes “civil” actions and in the worse cases, when intent is bad, uses its “criminal” enforcement authority.

- **Providing Reliable Data** – Fair and independent data is critical in understanding whether the rules are being followed. EPA’s multiple data systems monitor polluting facilities and track enforcement actions; this data helps states that have enforcement responsibilities. An online database allows the public to track whether facilities in their communities are in compliance; it had over 3.5 million page views in 2016.
- **Inspecting Facilities** – Nothing beats on-the-ground inspections to ensure that regulated facilities are complying with federal rules and regulations. Throughout the country, EPA trained and certified inspectors travel vast distances to meet with facility representatives, review records and reports, take photographs and samples and observe operations.
- **Stopping Environmental Crimes** – Sometimes companies willfully put communities at risk. Criminal enforcement is used to catch companies that cause deaths and serious injuries by cutting corners and lie about pollution from their facilities. Preparing criminal cases can be labor intensive, involving extensive legal and scientific research, data collection and analysis and investigations. But the results are critically important for the communities exposed to danger by companies that don’t follow the rules.
 - In Tonawanda, New York, for example, residents were exposed for many years to toxic air pollution from the Tonawanda Coke Corporation plant, which supplies raw materials for steel production. Air monitoring revealed high levels of benzene in the air from the plant. EPA provided grant funds to the local Clean Air Coalition and supported the community’s efforts to force the company into compliance. These efforts ultimately led to a criminal case that required the company to significantly reduce its benzene emissions and resulted in a \$12.5 million fine and jail time for the plant’s environmental manager.
- **Pursuing Polluters** – The pursuit of those responsible for contamination at Superfund sites across the country is critical to their cleanup. Superfund has a long-standing policy that polluters pay for cleanups, but when parties that created the contamination cannot be found, are no longer alive or are bankrupt, the government must cover cleanup costs. Identifying those responsible for contamination is resource intensive, but pays off in lowered government costs. Every dollar spent on efforts to get polluters to pay returns about \$8 in cleanup commitments, a worthwhile investment.

For Further information

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