

## EPA SUPERFUND TASK FORCE REPORT SUMMARY OF EPN COMMENTS October 5, 2017

### Overview

Since 1980, EPA's Superfund program has protected people's health and the environment by successfully managing the cleanup of the Nation's most hazardous waste sites and responding to local and nationally significant environmental emergencies. In July 2017, a Superfund Task Force commissioned by EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt made recommendations on ways to expedite the Superfund cleanup process, with an emphasis on reducing the burden on cooperating parties, providing incentives for them to conduct cleanups, encouraging private investment in cleanups and promoting revitalization.

The Environmental Protection Network (EPN), a group of former EPA officials and staff with many years of experience under both political parties, has substantial concerns about many of the recommendations, which depart significantly from past goals and approaches and could not be accomplished at the current level of funding. The key to success or failure lies in *how* the recommendations would be implemented.

### Key Concerns

- The Superfund program has effectively protected people's health, cleaned up sites and restored them to productive community use for many years. Why upend it?
- Many of the recommendations would require additional resources to achieve better outcomes, while the Trump/Pruitt Administration has proposed slashing funding for the Superfund program by 30%. This comes on top of a Superfund budget that has been decreased since 2000 and is now essentially flat-lined. There is a growing list of sites awaiting cleanup due to a lack of funding.
- A long-standing Superfund policy is to have the polluters pay for the cleanups whenever possible. Identifying those responsible for the contamination can be resource-intensive, but pays off in lowered government costs. Every dollar spent on these efforts returns about \$8 in cleanup commitments, a worthwhile investment.
- The stated intention of the EPA Administrator to be directly involved in decision-making at large sites and to focus weekly on 10 [high-priority sites](#) is impractical and technically questionable.
- The Administration's objective of reducing the burden on parties responsible for the contamination may be based on a desire to reduce their liability. There is a concern that EPA could move toward less effective cleanup methods, or that passive remedies could be used as precedents for less proactive and timely cleanups at other sites. There is also an overall risk that cleanup criteria could be weakened.
- An emphasis on "removal actions," which address emergency, immediate or short-term problems at sites, over longer-term cleanups could lead to less protective or less permanent cleanup plans. Cleanup criteria for these type of responses are often less stringent than more long-term actions to clean up sites.
- Many communities want to build housing on former industrial sites once they have been cleaned up. This requires more stringent cleanup levels, not less, to protect people from more toxic levels of residual contamination. But the push for streamlining and less stringent cleanup levels may make residential reuse impossible.
- The desire to shortcut the investigation phase of the Superfund process, during which the nature and extent of contamination and its health risks are determined, could lead to unintended consequences – arbitrary and misleading timelines for cleanups and the selection of cleanup plans without sufficient data to support them. This could lead to additional costs and time delays at the design and construction phases.

For more information, see EPN's longer analysis [here](#) or visit [www.environmentalprotectionnetwork.org](http://www.environmentalprotectionnetwork.org)  
Email EPN at: [info@environmentalprotectionnetwork.org](mailto:info@environmentalprotectionnetwork.org) or Kathy Setian at [ksetian@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ksetian@sbcglobal.net)