



# MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING ADMINISTRATOR



This email message is being sent to EPA employees.

Dear Colleagues,

As U.S. Environmental Protection Agency employees, we are part of a team charged with protection of human health and the environment. I have stated many times how honored I am to be a part of this team. We all have an important role in helping ensure that the EPA identifies and appropriately addresses human health and environmental risks consistent with its authorities. I am affirming, as past Administrators have, the importance of elevating human health and environmental risks so that we can properly assess and respond at appropriate policy and government levels in a timely and effective manner.

We must continue to review issues through our statutory role and be available to assist states, tribes and local governments when we see potential environmental vulnerability, including health risks, whether from air pollution, drinking water contamination, toxic chemicals, hazardous waste or other sources. We must approach our state, tribal and local government leaders as partners in problem solving and work closely with them to address human health and environmental risks.

EPA issued the original elevation policy in January 2016, following the drinking water crisis in Flint, Michigan. The people of Flint and all Americans deserve a responsive government.

It is our responsibility to ensure good communication at all levels in the agency - among our peers, across organizational lines and between the regions and headquarters. I expect all of us to use sound judgment in identifying and communicating issues and to do so in a way that enables us to engage the full decision-making resources of the agency. I also want to make clear that elevating issues supplements, not replaces, standard office protocols. Our first obligation is to notify our supervisors. An issue elevated at the regional level must be communicated to headquarters and vice versa so that we ensure the agency's response is proactive and coordinated. As a follow-up activity from the previous elevation memo, the Executive Management Council developed a common elevation procedure based on best practices and experiences throughout the EPA.

In addition to the usual and vital avenues of communication with teammates, co-workers and managers, we are launching a new agency web-based tool<sup>1</sup> that allows an EPA employee to provide agency senior management with notice of a perceived unaddressed significant risk to public health or the environment<sup>2</sup> that is within the scope of EPA authorities. The tool can be accessed by clicking the new "Report an Issue" quick link icon on the One EPA Workplace intranet home page or by using the URL <https://workplace.epa.gov/report-an-issue.html>.

The intent is to begin using the online form immediately and collect real-time user feedback to continuously improve the tool and process.

The notification will be shared with the Office of the Administrator and with a senior-level team that includes representatives of regional and national offices. The role of the team is to promptly assess and recommend any next steps for the reported concern.

It is important that everyone raise concerns quickly and think creatively when a broader perspective would suggest that a larger public health or environmental issue is at stake. Together we help the agency carry out its mission when we promptly elevate within the agency significant human health or environmental risks.

It is an honor to serve with you, and I am confident that in the years ahead we will continue to make great and long-lasting contributions for a healthier environment and a strong economy for the American people.

Andrew Wheeler

Acting Administrator

<sup>1</sup>This web-based notification tool does not alter or supersede employee rights or obligations under law or Executive Order, including relating to (1) classified information; (2) personally identifiable information; (3) confidential business information; (4) reporting to an Inspector General about a violation of law, rule or regulations, or about mismanagement, a gross waste of funds, an abuse of authority or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety; (5) communications to Congress; or (6) protected whistleblower communications.

<sup>2</sup> Characteristics could include the following: There appears to be a substantial threat to the environment or human health; or the EPA is or can reasonably be expected to be a focus of the need for action; or other authorities have a role in addressing the threat and may need federal assistance, including when those authorities appear to be unable to address or unsuccessful in effectively addressing such a threat; or recourse to normal enforcement and compliance tools is not appropriate or unlikely to succeed in the near term; or high and sustained public attention and concern is possible. The risk may involve a manner or subject handled by the EPA or a different governmental body.