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December 6, 2006

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The Honorable Stephen Johnson
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Ariel Rios Building
Washington DC, 20460

Dear Administrator Johnson:

Yesterday, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released a staff paper for the review of the national ambient air quality standards for lead.¹ Remarkably, EPA announced in this document that it would consider revoking the national standard for lead, leaving the nation with no national standard for lead air pollution.

I am writing to urge you to renounce this dangerous proposal immediately.

As you know, lead is a highly toxic element, which can cause brain damage, kidney damage, and other adverse effects. Children are particularly sensitive to lead, which can slow their cognitive development and reduce their growth. According to EPA:

Reproductive effects, such as decreased sperm count in men and spontaneous abortions in women, have been associated with high lead exposure. The developing fetus is at particular risk from maternal lead exposure, with low birth weight and slowed postnatal neurobehavioral development noted.²

¹ U.S. EPA, Review of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Lead: Policy Assessment of Scientific and Technical Information, OAQPS Staff Paper – First Draft (Dec. 4, 2006) (online at www.epa.gov/ttn/naaqs/standards/pb/data/pb_sp_1stdraft_120406.pdf).

² U.S. EPA, Lead Compounds, Hazard Summary (Jan. 2000) (online at www.epa.gov/ttn/atw/hlthef/lead.html).

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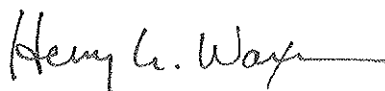
Regardless, EPA announced that it will evaluate the status of lead as a criteria air pollutant and “assess whether revocation of the standard is an appropriate option for the Administrator to consider.”³

At a time when the public health impacts of environmental pollution are becoming better understood and our reason for concern grows, this announcement by EPA is particularly misdirected. A federal abandonment of a national standard for lead air pollution would remove an important federal protection and send the wrong message to state and local governments, health professionals and the American people. This deregulatory effort cannot be defended.

Moreover, I have heard serious concern from within the agency that under your leadership, EPA is considering taking additional deregulatory actions that may harm public health in the weeks ahead. The American people rely on the federal government for critically important protections. I strongly urge you to avoid taking any additional actions to weaken protections for public health and the environment prior to consultation with Congress.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member

³ U.S. EPA, Review of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for Lead: Policy Assessment of Scientific and Technical Information, OAQPS Staff Paper – First Draft at 1-1 (Dec. 4, 2006) (online at www.epa.gov/ttn/naaqs/standards/pb/data/pb_sp_1stdraft_120406.pdf).