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National Labor, Environmental Coalition Urges EPA to Engage Workers During Inspections to Help Protect the Public

More than 100 Labor and Environmental Organizations Sign Letter to EPA Administrator; Ask Obama Administration to Enforce Law Allowing Workers and their Unions to Participate in Inspections of Facilities Using Highly Hazardous Substances

TRENTON, N.J. (December 3, 2009) The New Jersey Work Environment Council and the Blue Green Alliance, along with more than 100 prominent labor and environmental organizations from across the nation, have called on U.S. EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson to enforce an existing law encouraging worker and union participation during EPA inspections of facilities using extremely hazardous substances. A letter sent to Jackson said allowing workers and their union representatives to point out dangers during agency inspections would help protect both communities and the public.

Read the letter. http://www.njwec.org/PDF/Press/EPA%20_WPC_Final.pdf

Currently, New Jersey is the only state enforcing the law, Section 112(r) of the *Clean Air Act*. Jackson, when Assistant Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, helped issue a worker and union participation policy in 2005. The labor and environmental letter signers asked Jackson to take similar action on a national scale.

“More than 80 million people live, work and attend school within range of a potential catastrophic toxic release from at least one of the nation’s 101 most hazardous chemical facilities,” said John Pajak, President of the NJ Work Environment Council, an alliance of labor, community, and environmental organizations and an officer of Teamsters Local 877 in Linden, NJ. “Workers are on the front lines. We can help EPA protect both workers and the communities that surround our facilities.”

“Enforcing this law will help us reduce toxic releases to our environment, more accurately assess facility vulnerabilities, and better prepare and respond to potential chemical catastrophes,” said David Foster, Executive Director of the Blue Green Alliance, a national partnership of labor unions and environmental organizations. “It’s time to follow the law and make our workplaces, communities and environment more safe and secure.”

Since 1970, thousands of employees and union representatives have identified preventable hazards while accompanying OSHA inspectors. However, since 1990, when Congress enacted Section 112(r) of the *Clean Air Act*, EPA has generally not included workers and their union representatives during its

inspections. In New Jersey, where the Department of Environmental Protection's Toxic Catastrophe Prevention Program enforces *Clean Air Act Section 112(r)*, such worker participation has led to safety and security improvements.

The letter also asked Jackson to establish a task force of EPA staff and labor and environmental stakeholders to assess how greater worker and union participation could benefit other EPA inspection programs.

Among the 106 signing organizations, in addition to the Blue Green Alliance and the New Jersey Work Environment Council, are the national AFL-CIO, Change to Win, 21 national labor unions, and 14 national environmental organizations.

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About the New Jersey Work Environment Council:

The New Jersey Work Environment Council (WEC) is an alliance of 70 labor, environmental, and community organizations working for safe, secure jobs and a healthy, sustainable environment. WEC links workers, communities, and environmentalists through training, technical assistance, grassroots organizing and public policy campaigns to promote dialogue, collaboration, and joint action. Formed in 1986, WEC is the nation's oldest state labor/environmental (or "blue/green") coalition. For more information about WEC, please visit <http://www.njwec.org>.

About the Blue Green Alliance:

The Blue Green Alliance is a national partnership of labor unions and environmental organizations dedicated to expanding the number and quality of jobs in the green economy. The alliance includes six major labor unions—United Steelworkers, CWA, LIUNA, SEIU, AFT and the Utility Workers—and two major environmental organizations—Sierra Club and NRDC—uniting more than eight million people in pursuit of good jobs, a clean environment and a green economy.