

EPA:

Watchdog group ridicules Obama order

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Published: Thursday, August 18, 2016

Someone has time to kill at the White House.

So says the watchdog group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility after reviewing President Obama's [executive order](#) that changed U.S. EPA's order of succession.

Issued last Friday, Obama's order lists who would run the agency if Administrator Gina McCarthy died, resigned or otherwise couldn't perform her duties. The president made some minor tweaks and added three positions to the succession list, meaning there are now 18 people who could head EPA, including the administrator and deputy administrator ([Greenwire](#), Aug. 12).

Jeff Ruch, PEER's executive director, said it's all a colossal waste of time.

"These morbid yet oddly specific presidential actions tinker with scenarios which have never occurred and likely never will," Ruch said in a statement.

"Nor is it likely helpful that in the event of a nuclear attack or other cataclysm befalling the nation's capital, 13 of the 16 listed replacements to run EPA are also based inside the Beltway."

Despite the succession order, Obama still has the authority to designate whomever he wants as acting EPA chief, Ruch said. Moreover, he said, there are greater problems that should be taking up the White House's time now than who is 17th or 18th in line to take over EPA if disaster strikes.

"What makes this even sillier is that in spite of this elaborate listing, the President still retains the prerogative to designate whomever he or she wants to be acting EPA Administrator," Ruch said.

"Given all of the challenges facing the country, this seems to be an awfully marginal use of official time."

Obama last updated EPA's succession order with an [executive order](#) issued in 2012.

EPA changed its succession order this time as the agency prepares for a presidential transition in an election year. Spokeswoman Melissa Harrison said EPA needed "adequate depth" for its order of succession, adding more career staff to the list of who could take over the agency.

"EPA proposes revisions to the order of succession for the EPA administrator primarily to ensure adequate depth in the order of succession for presidential transitions and for national security emergencies. Such depth includes an increased number of EPA career officials," Harrison said.

Harrison said the revisions to EPA's succession order are in response to recommendations from a Federal Emergency Management Agency audit of EPA's continuity of operations exercises.

"Greater depth is necessary in light of normal attrition of senior EPA personnel serving in both non-career and career senior leadership positions, in duty stations in the District of Columbia and outside the area," Harrison said.

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