Honorable Members of Congress:

We, the undersigned, are Presidents of 22 Local Unions representing over 10,000 United States Environmental Protection Agency (“U.S. EPA” or “Agency”) environmental engineers, scientists, risk managers, environmental protection specialists and related staff. We are writing to express our concerns about the impact of U.S. EPA’s budget cuts on the operations of U.S. EPA’s laboratories. We are especially concerned about U.S. EPA management’s efforts to close, relocate and consolidate the Agency’s laboratories.

At laboratories located throughout the nation, the Agency works to assess environmental conditions and to identify, understand, and solve current and future environmental problems; integrate the work of scientific partners such as nations, private sector organizations, academia and other agencies; and provide leadership in addressing emerging environmental issues and in advancing the science and technology of risk assessment and risk management. This work is critical to achieving EPA’s mission of environmental protection.

Yet U.S. EPA’s ability to continue to do this work will be jeopardized by U.S. EPA’s Laboratory Consolidation Plan, as outlined in a memo written by Lyons Gray, U.S. EPA’s Chief Financial Officer, titled “FY 2008 Budget Guidance.” U.S. EPA’s Budget Guidance calls for the development of “a plan for reducing the Agency’s laboratory infrastructure costs by a minimum of 10% by 2009 and another 10% by 2011.” This Budget Guidance even goes farther to call for a “... recommendation for closing, relocating, and consolidating lab/field locations” and “... an approach for reducing or relocating necessary staff.”

According to an U.S. EPA memorandum dated October 26, 2006, these recommendations from U.S. EPA’s Laboratory Infrastructure Review are due to Administrator Johnson by April 30, 2007. This infrastructure review specifies, “...To the extent that workgroups identify low hanging fruit and recommendations that could be implemented immediately to realize savings, such actions should be taken.”
The Federal employee unions at U.S. EPA support the Agency’s efforts to provide the best value for the taxpayers’ dollar. Our concern is that the cuts being proposed for savings in laboratory services are deep and will likely impact the quality and quantity of work produced at U.S. EPA’s laboratories. If the U.S. EPA shuts or consolidates its laboratories like it did its libraries, the very mission of the U.S. EPA would be in jeopardy. If decisions are made to “contract out” the work of U.S. EPA’s laboratories, we would become very concerned about the independence and objectivity of the scientific work.

The unions at U.S. EPA support any proposals that will make the Agency work more efficiently and productively for the American public. In light of U.S. EPA budget cuts for research and development in FY 2007 and FY 2008, we are concerned that potential closures and/or reductions in workforce will be driven by budget cuts, not efficiency or productivity goals.

On April 2, 2007, the Supreme Court ruled that U.S. EPA has the authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, which means the Agency will be called upon to address this great challenge with the best science and policy. To meet this great challenge and the other important protections for the environment we live in, U.S. EPA must have adequate resources to perform its duty.

Therefore, U.S. EPA’s unions request more oversight through Committee hearings on U.S. EPA’s efforts to achieve deep cuts in research and development. Specifically, we recommend a GAO study of the advantages and disadvantages of future U.S. EPA decisions that impact laboratory capabilities and operations.

Attachments

Sincerely yours,

Dwight A. Welch, Union Co-Chair  
U.S. EPA National Partnership Council  
NTEU Chapter 280/Washington, DC

William Evans, President  
NTEU Chapter 280/U.S. EPA HQ’s  
Washington, DC

Steve Shapiro, President  
AFGE Local 3331/U.S. EPA HQ’s  
Washington, DC

Henry G. Burrell, President  
AFGE Local 3428/U.S. EPA Region 1  
Boston, MA

Paul Sacker, President  
AFGE Local 3911/U.S. EPA Region 2  
New York City, NY

Alan Hollis, President  
AFGE Local 3631/U.S. EPA Region 3  
Philadelphia, PA

Andrew Dunn, President  
NAGE Local R5-55/U.S. EPA Region 4  
Atlanta, GA

John J. O’Grady, President  
AFGE Local 704/U.S. EPA Region 5  
Chicago, IL

May 23, 2007 U.S. EPA Union Coalition  
Letter to Congress on Consolidation of EPA Labs
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Paul Scoggins, President
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