

Conservation Committee Report

Volume 26 Issue 11

Jack Walters—Conservation Chairman

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The Conservation Pledge

I give my pledge as an

American to save and faithfully defend from waste, the natural resources of my country; the soil, the water, the air, the minerals, the plant life and the wildlife.

This is my Pledge!

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EPA Head of Water Office Visits Pennsylvania to Tout \$10 million in Funding to Replace Lead Pipes and Upgrade Water Infrastructure

The head of U.S. EPA's Office of Water, Bruno Pigott, joined Congresswoman Summer Lee (D-PA) in Pittsburgh and Congressman Chris Deluzio (D-PA) in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, to meet with community

leaders and highlight federally supported water infrastructure improvement projects under the Biden-Harris Administration's Investing in America Agenda, such as lead pipe replacements and wastewater treatment upgrades that are ensuring clean, safe

water for communities.

"EPA is working with states and local partners to achieve our shared goal that all people have access to clean and safe water," **Pigott said**, who also met with local and regional water officials in Michigan,

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Shapiro Administration Plugs Orphan Well That Contaminated Family's Water

Under Governor Shapiro's leadership, DEP has made historic progress, plugging more than 270 wells across Pennsylvania. DEP has also provided the family with a

temporary water supply during the plugging process

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) continues to address the problem of orphan oil and gas wells in Pennsylvania, plugging a

well in Clarion County that contaminated a local family's drinking water.

"Orphaned and Abandoned wells present serious risks to the environment and public health by polluting groundwater

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EPA Head of Water Office Visits Pennsylvania to Tout \$10 million in Funding to Replace Lead Pipes and Upgrade Water Infrastructure (continued)

Ohio, Colorado, and California in the past two weeks to view the progress of water projects there. “The Biden-Harris Administration has made the single largest water infrastructure investment in our nation’s history, and I saw it in action in Pennsylvania, where this funding is creating local jobs to remove lead pipes in Pittsburgh and upgrade wastewater treatment operations in nearby Findlay Township.”

These engagements come on heels of an additional nationwide funding announcement of [\\$3.6 billion dollars for water infrastructure](#) through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Pigott attended a lead service line replacement by [Pittsburgh](#) Water and Sewer Authority (PWSA) boosted by Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding. The science is clear that there is no safe level of exposure to lead and PWSA has become a national leader in removing lead pipes that deliver drinking water to homes, having identified and replaced lead pipes for years. Also boosted by federal and state funding, PWSA has replaced more than 11,800 lead pipes across the city to date, positioning Pittsburgh to meet the goal of 100% lead service line replacement within 10 years.

Congresswoman Summer Lee emphasized the importance of these initiatives for Pittsburgh’s families, particularly in historically underserved neighborhoods. “The reality is, today isn’t just about pipes or infrastructure—it’s about protecting our kids, creating jobs, and showing what happens when we roll up our sleeves to get lead out of our water,” **said Rep. Lee**. “Thanks to the Biden administration’s Lead and Copper Rule Improvements and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we’re seeing action. The federal government is backing us with the resources we need to speed things up. And Pittsburgh is stepping up as a model, proving that when we invest in communities, we get real, lasting results.”

Video here on health effects of lead poisoning: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O3f7WeahCBs>.

In Findlay Township, Pennsylvania, the wastewater treatment infrastructure and operations have needed upgrades to improve efficiency and protect local waterbodies. EPA was able to help fund this critical infrastructure project for the community. EPA was able to help fund this critical wastewater infrastructure project for the community with \$5 million from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

“Folks don’t often think about the water systems we depend on day in and day out, but our water systems are a piece of the critical infrastructure puzzle that keeps our communities running safely and smoothly,” **said Representative Deluzio**. “I’m so proud to join EPA and Findlay Township leadership to celebrate the Infrastructure Law’s \$5 million investment into wastewater operations to help strengthen our region’s critical infrastructure for generations to come.”

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EPA Head of Water Office Visits Pennsylvania to Tout \$10 million in Funding to Replace Lead Pipes and Upgrade Water Infrastructure (continued)

State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs have been the foundation of water infrastructure investments for more than 30 years, providing low-cost financing for local projects across America. SRF programs are critically important programs for investing in the nation's water infrastructure. They are designed to generate significant and sustainable water quality and public health benefits across the country. Their impact is amplified by the growth inherent in a revolving loan structure, in which payments of principal and interest on loans become available to address future needs.

Source: The U.S. EPA

Shapiro Administration Plugs Orphan Well That Contaminated Family's Water (continued)

and leaking methane into the atmosphere. This well site is an example of those impacts – where residents can't drink their water because of this orphaned well," said Acting Secretary Jessica Shirley. "Thanks to the efforts of Shapiro Administration, we finally have the resources to address wells like these that are affecting peoples' lives."

This gas well is located just six feet away from the family's potable water well – and the DEP had confirmed iron from the gas well was getting into the water well. The water well, which was this family's only source of drinking water, had been unusable for five months. With no access to public water, the DEP began providing a temporary water supply throughout the course of the plugging process.

Since day one, the Shapiro Administration has been dedicated to maximizing every opportunity to plug orphan and abandoned wells in Pennsylvania, successfully plugging over 270 wells so far — more than in the previous 10 years combined. The 2024-25 budget allocated \$11 million to DEP's Office of Oil and Gas Management, ensuring that Pennsylvania can fully leverage available federal funds for well plugging.

Plugging wells can vary in cost based on several factors. Age, depth and location all contribute to rising costs to plug a well. Conditions, such as the ones found in this particularly aged well, are a perfect example of how a troublesome well can add time and money to a plugging project. In 2024, the average cost to plug wells under the initial Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) Grant has been just over \$105,000.

As a result of unforeseen conditions surrounding this well, the total cost is closer to \$500,000 due to the poor condition of the steel casing in the well.

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Shapiro Administration Plugs Orphan Well That Contaminated Family's Water (continued)

The Department of Interior recently awarded Pennsylvania another \$76 million to address the plugging of orphaned and abandoned oil and gas wells. The \$76 million is the first round of Formula Grant funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), which could provide up to \$300 million over the next three to five years; advancing ongoing efforts to protect public health, reducing methane emissions that contribute to climate change, and creating good-paying Pennsylvania jobs.

DEP has identified over 27,000 orphaned and abandoned wells and is prioritizing those posing the highest risks. New plugging contracts will focus on these high-priority wells, along with nearby wells, to maximize efficiency and preempt environmental threats.

Pennsylvania's long history of energy development dates back to 1859, when the first commercial oil well was drilled in Titusville. More information about the [orphan and abandoned well plugging program](#) is available on DEP's website: [Rewriting Pennsylvania's Legacy](#).

For more information, visit the [Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's website](#).

Source: The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

EPA Updates Ventilation Guidance to Prevent the Spread of Respiratory Viruses at Home, School, and Work

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has released updated guidance on indoor air quality strategies for preventing the spread of common respiratory viruses in homes, schools, offices, and commercial buildings. EPA's updated guidance reflects the latest science on indoor air quality strategies and recent ventilation recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"This updated guidance will be a valuable tool in protecting against the spread of common airborne respiratory viruses indoors, where we spend about 90% of our time," **said Joseph Goffman, Assistant Administrator for EPA's Office of Air and Radiation.** "In addition to immunizations, handwashing, and other key preventive measures, taking action to promote healthier indoor air helps to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses indoors."

The updated guidance outlines how to implement ventilation strategies, such as opening doors and windows, as part of a multi-layered approach to prevent the spread of respiratory viruses indoors. The approach includes filtration improvements, such as upgrading the filter in a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system; using a portable air cleaner; running fans to circulate air indoors; and operating exhaust, window, and attic fans to further reduce the amount of virus particles in the air. This multi-layered approach also addresses the use of air treatment technologies, administrative controls, and cleaning and disinfection practices. The updated guidance also outlines specific strategies and considerations for public indoor spaces, such as schools, offices, and commercial buildings.

View EPA's updated guidance and learn more:

- [Ventilation and Respiratory Viruses](#)
- [Preventing the Spread of Respiratory Viruses in Public Indoor Spaces](#)

Background

Most people are aware that outdoor air pollution can impact their health, but indoor air pollution can also have significant and harmful health effects. Indoor Air Quality refers to the air quality within and around buildings and structures, especially as it relates to the health

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EPA Updates Ventilation Guidance to Prevent the Spread of Respiratory Viruses at Home, School, and Work (continued)

and comfort of building occupants. Indoor air quality affects everyone, especially the most vulnerable, including children, the elderly, and people with health conditions like asthma and heart disease.

Understanding and controlling common pollutants indoors can help reduce your risk of indoor health concerns. Health effects from indoor air pollutants may be experienced soon after exposure or, possibly, years later. Indoor pollution sources that release gases or particles into the air are the primary cause of indoor air quality problems. Inadequate ventilation can increase indoor pollutant levels by not bringing in enough outdoor air to dilute emissions from indoor sources and not carrying indoor air pollutants out of the area.

Respiratory viruses can spread more easily indoors than outdoors since the viral concentration can build up indoors and people are closer to each other. Each year, respiratory viruses are responsible for millions of illnesses and thousands of hospitalizations and deaths in the United States. In addition to the virus that causes COVID-19, there are many other types of airborne respiratory viruses, including influenza (flu) and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), that can spread more easily indoors than outdoors.

Ventilation and filtration are important components of a multilayered approach for reducing the spread of respiratory viruses indoors. Increasing the amount of outdoor air coming indoors is one of the most important ways to reduce the likelihood that viruses are spread. When it is challenging to enhance the ventilation to a space, consider cleaning or treating the air to reduce virus particles – through filters in your heating, ventilation and air conditioning system or using portable air cleaning devices. On their own, these individual IAQ strategies are not likely to be sufficient for preventing the spread of respiratory viruses indoors, making it essential to implement each of them in conjunction with other core [preventive actions for respiratory viruses](#) recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For further information: EPA Press Office (press@epa.gov)

Source: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

EPA Announces Members to the Farm, Ranch and Rural Communities Advisory Committee

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael S. Regan announced the appointment of 18 new members and reappointment of 6 members to the Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Federal Advisory Committee. The FRRCC provides independent policy advice and recommendations to the Administrator on crucial environmental issues affecting agriculture and rural communities.

Dr. Beth Sauerhaft, of American Farmland Trust, will remain as chair, and Mr. Michael Crowder, from Ducks Unlimited, will serve as vice-chair, leading the FRRCC's work alongside 13 existing members whose terms expire November 2025. Together, these members bring a wealth of experience and represent a broad array of perspectives from academia, agriculture and allied industries, non-governmental organizations, and state, local and tribal governments.

"EPA remains committed to ensuring agricultural and rural communities and are fully engaged as partners in our work to protect our environment and advance public health," **said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan.** "The diverse perspectives of these new appointees, along with our dedicated returning members, will be instrumental in helping us navigate environmental challenges and deliver science-based, practical solutions that strengthen our nation's food and agriculture systems for generations to come."

The FRRCC will continue to be both productive and valuable to EPA. In addition to the recommendations submitted earlier this year, the committee has provided an additional series of [32 recommendations to Administrator Regan \(pdf\)](#) on topics including improvements to the technical assistance EPA provides to rural communities, outreach and education on solar energy programs that support agriculture, and ways that EPA can scale up public-private partnerships and market-based approaches to accelerate the adoption of agricultural conservation practices. These recommendations represent the work the committee has done in 2024 in alignment with the committee charge set out by Administrator Regan. The Administrator looks forward to issuing the agency's response to these recommendations in the coming weeks.

The selection process for new members began in July 2024, with EPA issuing a [request for nominations](#) that drew more than 80 applicants. The agency selected individuals from a diverse and highly qualified pool, ensuring representation across all 10 EPA regions

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EPA Announces Members to the Farm, Ranch and Rural Communities Advisory Committee (continued)

and from 24 states, territories and the District of Columbia. Members were chosen for their expertise in key EPA priority areas, including climate change and sustainable agricultural practices and represent a variety of agricultural sectors, rural stakeholders, diverse geographies.

NEW MEMBERS

- **Megan Dwyer**, Illinois Corn Growers Association, Bloomington, Illinois
- **Katherine English**, English Family Farms, Fort Meyers, Florida
- **Maria Fernanda Abilgaard**, AgroFresh, Fairfield, California
- **Jamaica Gayle**, Plant Based Products Council, Washington D.C.
- **Dr. Russell Hamlin**, Grimmway Farms, Bakersfield, California
- **James Henderson**, Richfield Ranch Ag Ventures Inc., La Jara, Colorado
- **Joe Ben Herrera**, Yakama Nation Environmental Management Program, Toppenish, Washington
- **Janie Simms Hipp**, Native Agriculture Financial Services, Fayetteville, Arkansas
- **Erik Huschitt**, Badger State Ethanol, Monroe, Wisconsin
- **Stephen Logan**, Logan Farms, Giliam, Louisiana
- **Mark Masters**, Georgia Water Planning and Policy Center at Albany State University, Albany, Georgia
- **Ty Myer**, Spokane Conservation District, Spokane, Washington
- **Dr. Michelle Miller**, Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, University of Wisconsin Madison, Madison, Wisconsin
- **Megan Rock**, CHS, Inc., Inner Grove Heights, Minnesota
- **Justin Sherlock**, Justin Sherlock Farms, Dazey, North Dakota
- **Chris Tanner**, Tanner Farms, Norton, Kansas

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EPA Announces Members to the Farm, Ranch and Rural Communities Advisory Committee (continued)

- **J. Alan Weber**, Biodiesel Coalition of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri
- **Kathryn Zeffuss**, Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

RETURNING MEMBERS

- **William (Bill) Couser**, Couser Cattle Company, Nevada, Iowa
- **Matthew Freund**, Freund's Farm/Cowpots LLC, East Canaan, Connecticut
- **David Graybill**, Red Sunset Farm, Mifflintown, Pennsylvania
- **William Thomas (Tom) McDonald**, Five Rivers Cattle Feeding, Dalhart, Texas
- **Dr. Graciela I. Ramirez-Toro**, Inter American University of Puerto Rico, San Germán, Puerto Rico
- **Jeff M. Witte**, New Mexico Department of Agriculture, Las Cruces, New Mexico

EXISTING MEMBERS

- **Dr. Beth Sauerhaft**, American Farmland Trust, Chappaqua, New York (Committee Chair)
- **Brad Bray**, Bray Farms, Cameron, Missouri
- **Hon. Eddie Crandell**, Lake County Supervisor and Board Delegate, California
- **Michael Crowder**, Ducks Unlimited, West Richland, Washington (Committee Vice-Chair)
- **Jennifer James**, H&J Land & Co. And Auvergne Grain Co., Newport, Arkansas
- **Sarah Lucas**, Michigan Office of Rural Development, Marquette, Michigan
- **Clay Pope**, Pope Hilltop Farm, Loyal, Oklahoma
- **Dr. James Pritchett**, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado

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EPA Announces Members to the Farm, Ranch and Rural Communities Advisory Committee (continued)

- **Dr. Nithya Rajan**, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas
- **Dr. Raymon Shange**, Tuskegee University, Tuskegee, Alabama
- **Jennifer Simmelink**, Kansas Soil Health Alliance, Esbon, Kansas
- **Dr. Chantel Simpson**, North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, North Carolina
- **Ryan Smith**, Danone North America, Chicago, Illinois

For more information about the committee, please visit the [FRRCC website](#).

For further information: EPA Press Office (press@epa.gov)

Source: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

EPA Awards \$2.8 Million to Small Businesses for Developing Environmental Technologies

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced \$2.8 million in funding to seven small businesses to further develop and commercialize their environmental technologies. With these awards from EPA's Small Business Innovation Research program, businesses will be tackling complex challenges including destroying PFAS, cleaning indoor air during wildfires, enhancing recycling systems, reducing food waste, and improving disaster response.

"Congratulations to these small businesses for continuing to pursue innovative solutions to some of our most pressing environmental challenges," said **Maureen Gwinn, Acting Assistant Administrator for EPA's Office of Research and Development**. "EPA is proud to invest in these small businesses as they work to help protect human health and the environment across many sectors and help grow the American economy."

For over 40 years, EPA's SBIR program has funded small businesses as they create environmental technologies and bring them to the marketplace. SBIR projects are funded in a phased approach. For Phase I, EPA awards contracts of up to \$100,000 for six months for "proof of concept" of the proposed technology. Small businesses that have received a Phase I award can compete for a Phase II award of \$400,000 to further develop and commercialize the technology.

The following businesses are receiving about \$400,000 each in SBIR Phase II awards for these projects:

- **DiPole Materials, Inc.**, Baltimore, Maryland, to design a biodegradable filter made of electro-spun nanofibers to clean indoor air during wildfires.
- **Fourth State LLC**, Ann Arbor, Michigan, for a plasma treatment technology to destroy PFAS in complex water matrices.
- **GreenLife Tech Corporation**, Banner Elk, North Carolina, for an autonomous system that controls oxygen levels in refrigerators to preserve produce for a longer time.
- **Holochip Corporation**, Torrance, California, to build an artificial intelligence application to map sites to improve the safety and efficacy of disaster response.
- **KLAW Industries LLC**, Binghamton, New York, to produce a rapidly deployable, autonomous robotic sorting system to improve recycling facilities in disadvantaged communities.
- **Valis Insights, Inc.**, Worcester, Massachusetts, to develop an automated and AI-driven technology that helps optimize the sorting process for metals recycling.

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EPA Awards \$2.8 Million to Small Businesses for Developing Environmental Technologies (continued)

- **Water Illumination, Inc.**, Riverside, California, to create a novel chemical-free UV based PFAS destruction technology for saline wastewater treatment.

[Learn more about the winning projects.](#)

[Learn more about EPA's SBIR program.](#)

[Learn more about SBIR](#)

For further information: Contact: US EPA Press Office (press@epa.gov)

Source: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Shapiro Administration Awards Funding to Protect Lake Erie Coastal Zone

This year's projects emphasize environmental education, community outreach, and continued research to benefit this critical habitat and ecosystem.

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) awarded Coastal Zone Grants totaling more than \$288,000 to seven projects in the state's Northwest region. The grants, which are aimed at protecting and restoring the Lake Erie Coastal Zone, will be used toward projects that will benefit this critical habitat and ecosystem.

"The Coastal Zone Grants are aimed at supporting programs that measure the impact of various pollution sources, improve public access, preserve habitats, and educate the public about the benefits of the state's coastal zones," said **DEP Interim Acting Secretary, Jessica Shirley**. "Each year, recipients of these grants do amazing work and the DEP is committed to continue supporting these partners with grant funding and technical assistance."

A coastal zone is an area where land meets the coast and includes both coastal waters and adjacent shorelands. Coastal Zone Grants are awarded to projects related to fisheries, wetlands, recreation, public education, coastal hazards such as bluff recession, and other areas. Grants may also be awarded to other projects in the watershed that have an impact on coastal waters.

The 77-mile Lake Erie coastal zone is in Erie County and includes the Lake Erie shoreline and several major tributaries. The coastal zone also extends to the middle of the lake, to the international boundary with Canada, and inland an average of 1.4 miles.

Approved projects include:

Erie County Department of Planning and Community Development - \$81,000 for coordination and technical assistance with Lake Erie Coastal Zone grantees, municipalities and residents and to assist Lake Erie coastal communities in administering the Bluff Recession and Setback Act of 1980.

Shapiro Administration Awards Funding to Protect Lake Erie Coastal Zone (continued)

Mercyhurst University - \$62,000 to update the Vegetative Best Management Practices manual for bluff landowners, originally published in 2007.

Regional Science Consortium - \$50,000 to support monitoring, water sampling and data analysis of the Harmful Algal Blooms in the waters of Lake Erie and Presque Isle Bay.

Bayfront East Side Taskforce - \$15,000 to implement the Same Day Work and Pay Program, a neighborhood wide program to remove litter, alleviate some barriers to employment and foster community ownership.

Erie Bird Observatory - \$30,000 for songbird migration research and visitor engagement at Presque Isle State Park.

PA Cleanways / Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful - \$25,000 for community clean ups and marine debris removal in the Lake Erie Coastal Zone.

Regional Science Consortium – \$25,000 to collect water, weather and wave measurements to analyze data from two buoys on Lake Erie, identifying water quality trends relative to real time data.

Pennsylvania's Coastal Resources Management Program (CRMP) receives an annual grant award from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). A portion of this award is used to fund eligible projects that address CRMP priorities. The funds are distributed through sub-grant awards to local and state government agencies as well as nonprofit groups with projects located in the Delaware Estuary or Lake Erie Coastal Zones. Applications are accepted late August through mid-October with project funding awarded on or around October 1 of the following year. To learn more about Coastal Zone grants, visit [DEP's website](#).

For more information on the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, please visit the [website](#).

Shapiro Administration Awards Funding to Protect Lake Erie Coastal Zone (continued)

Source: The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

Shapiro Administration Reduces DEP Permit Backlog by 75 Percent, Completely Eliminates Backlog for Oil and Gas Permits

Early investments in permit reduction are paying dividends for Pennsylvania businesses and residents as DEP can respond to applicants more quickly and ensure Pennsylvanians' clean air and pure water is protected

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has reduced its permit backlog by 75 percent since November 1, 2023 – and has completely eliminated the backlog for oil and gas permits.

“At DEP we are moving at the speed of business – taking care of backlogged permits and not adding to the list – while protecting clean air and water and public health,” said **DEP Acting Secretary Jessica Shirley**. “We’ve invested in people and technology to meet the needs of the people and businesses of Pennsylvania and those investments are paying off.”

DEP reviews more than 45,000 permit applications every year. These include permits for land clearing activities for construction projects, air quality permits for factories and power plants, permits to upgrade drinking waters systems to remove chemicals like PFAS, and permits for oil and gas wells.

DEP is modernizing its permitting process by investing in technology and reviewing processes to identify and eliminate bottlenecks. DEP began the backlog reduction initiative on November 1, 2023, and had more than 2,400 permit applications that required action received prior to that date. As of November 15, 2024, DEP eliminated 1,750 applications from this backlog – a 73% reduction, while keeping up with new application reviews. In the Office of Oil and Gas Management, staff have reviewed and made decisions on all 115 permit applications received before November 1, 2023.

Throughout the Shapiro Administration, DEP has been hiring staff to improve operational efficiency. Since 2023, DEP has added 225 employees to carry out critical functions like public health and safety inspections and permit application reviews.

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Shapiro Administration Reduces DEP Permit Backlog by 75 Percent, Completely Eliminates Backlog for Oil and Gas Permits (continued)

Governor Josh Shapiro and the Pennsylvania General Assembly approved \$7 million for technology updates and upgrades in the 2024-25 state budget, which will be used to increase transparency for permit applicants and residents and improve DEP's record keeping systems.

DEP will also implement the SPEED program, which was part of the bipartisan 2024-25 budget signed by Governor Josh Shapiro. The SPEED program offers increased flexibility, allowing permit applicants to have a DEP-verified and qualified professional conduct the initial review of the application. DEP staff will review the recommendations of the qualified professional and either make a final permit decision or identify technical deficiencies to the applicant. DEP will have final authority over all permit decisions. Applicants for eligible permits will agree to pay any review fees incurred by the qualified professional, in addition to permit application fees.

Invitations for Bids are being accepted through the Pennsylvania [eMarketplace](#) for the qualified professionals to review SPEED permit applications. The SPEED program will be available for certain [Air Quality Plan Approvals](#), [earth disturbance](#), [dam safety](#), and [individual water obstruction and encroachment permits](#).

DEP has sped up its permitting process through the PAYback program, which went into effect in November 2023 that assures a moneyback guarantee for permit applicants if their application is overdue. Since going into effect, DEP has evaluated and decided on more than 40,000 permits without having to refund a single application fee.

DEP is continuing to identify process improvements in its permitting programs. In May 2024, DEP launched a [pilot program for Chapter 102 Individual National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System \(NPDES\)](#) Permit applications in ten counties. The goal of the pilot program was to reduce overall time between application and decision. This pilot program is already showing results, with one permit application submitted through the program receiving approval 73 days quicker than the average review time.

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Shapiro Administration Reduces DEP Permit Backlog by 75 Percent, Completely Eliminates Backlog for Oil and Gas Permits (continued)

DEP has also significantly improved the Chapter 105 Water Obstruction and Encroachment General Permit registration process by updating the registration form and instructions to make them easier to understand. DEP also launched a new Chapter 105 Pilot Program for individual Joint Permit Applications that should reduce errors in applications and cut the total time to process an application by 63 days. Similar to the Chapter 102 Pilot Program, applicants will need to meet with DEP prior to submitting a permit application. The Chapter 105 individual Permit Pilot Program will give review priority to publicly funded energy projects and environmental restoration projects.

For more information, visit the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection's [website](#).

Source: The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

EPA Finalizes Rule to Reduce Wasteful Methane Emissions and Drive Innovation in the Oil and Gas Sector

As global leaders gather in Baku for COP29, EPA delivers latest action under President Biden's Methane Emissions Reduction Action Plan

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced a final rule to reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas sector. The rule facilitates implementation of Congress's directive in the Inflation Reduction Act to collect a Waste Emissions Charge to better ensure valuable natural gas reaches the market rather than polluting the air. Congress established the charge on large emitters of methane if their emissions exceed specific performance levels and directed EPA to collect the charge and implement other features of the program, including providing appropriate exemptions for actions that reduce methane releases. Today's final rule delivers on this directive and incentivizes companies to take near-term action to conserve valuable energy resources for American consumers and reduce methane emissions – a potent greenhouse gas that is responsible for approximately one-third of the global warming we are experiencing today.

“The final Waste Emissions Charge is the latest in a series of actions under President Biden's methane strategy to improve efficiency in the oil and gas sector, support American jobs, protect clean air, and reinforce U.S. leadership on the global stage,” **said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan**. “EPA has been engaging with industry, states, and communities to reduce methane emissions so that natural gas ultimately makes it to consumers as usable fuel — instead of as a harmful greenhouse gas. Along with EPA's complementary set of technology standards and historic financial and technical resources under the Inflation Reduction Act, today's action ensures that America continues to lead in deploying technologies and innovations that lower our emissions.”

EPA estimates that this rule alone will result in cumulative emissions reductions of 1.2 million metric tons of methane (34 million metric tons CO₂-equivalent) through 2035 — the equivalent of taking nearly 8 million gas-powered cars off the road for a year — and will have cumulative climate benefits of up to \$2 billion.

As directed by Congress, the Waste Emissions Charge applies only to waste emissions from high-emitting oil and gas facilities. The Inflation Reduction Act provides that the Waste Emissions Charge applies to methane from certain oil and gas facilities that report emissions of more than 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year to the Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program, beginning with methane emissions reported in calendar year 2024. Also, as directed by Congress, the Waste Emissions Charge starts at \$900 per metric ton of wasteful emissions in CY 2024, increasing to \$1,200 for CY 2025, and \$1,500 for CY 2026 and beyond, and only applies to emissions that exceed statutorily specified methane intensity levels.

EPA Finalizes Rule to Reduce Wasteful Methane Emissions and Drive Innovation in the Oil and Gas Sector (continued)

EPA's final rule details how the charge will be implemented, including the calculation of the charge and how exemptions from the charge will be applied. Facilities in compliance with the recently finalized Clean Air Act standards for oil and gas operations would be exempt from the charge after certain criteria set by Congress are met. The agency expects that over time, fewer facilities will face the charge as they reduce their emissions and become eligible for this regulatory compliance exemption.

In keeping with the provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act, the Waste Emissions Charge works in concert both with Clean Air Act standards issued in March 2024 to limit methane from new and existing oil and gas operations, and with over \$1 billion in financial and technical assistance that EPA has partnered with the U.S. Department of Energy to provide under the Inflation Reduction Act to support monitoring and mitigation of methane emissions from the oil and gas sector. Combined, these actions will help position the United States as the most efficient producer of oil and natural gas in the world and ensure that the industry remains competitive in overseas markets that require a minimum level of emissions performance.

In the final rule, EPA made changes in response to public comments that will provide owners and operators of oil and natural gas facilities with greater flexibility to achieve emission reductions and thereby avoid the charge. States now have a stronger incentive to submit satisfactory plans for limiting methane from existing oil and gas operations in a timely manner. Additionally, the Waste Emissions Charge will apply until oil and gas operators achieve full compliance with state plans, helping to incentivize better performance. The final rule also provides additional clarity on exemptions and other provisions of the rule.

Background

Methane is a climate "super pollutant" — over 100 years, one ton of emitted methane traps 28 times as much heat in the Earth system as one ton of emitted carbon dioxide. The oil and natural gas sector is the largest industrial source of methane emissions in the United States. Rapid reductions in methane emissions are one of the most important and cost-effective actions the United States can take in the short term to slow the rate of rapidly ris-

EPA Finalizes Rule to Reduce Wasteful Methane Emissions and Drive Innovation in the Oil and Gas Sector (continued)

ing global temperatures. Because methane in the atmosphere leads to the production of ozone, reducing methane emissions reduces ozone levels and protects public health.

The Waste Emissions Charge is a key component of EPA efforts to reduce domestic methane emissions. In March 2024, EPA issued final standards under the Clean Air Act to sharply reduce methane emissions and other harmful air pollution from new and existing oil and gas operations. In the Inflation Reduction Act, Congress built a framework of additional measures under the Methane Emissions Reduction Program — including the Waste Emissions Charge and funding for financial and technical assistance — to complement EPA's final standards and ensure reductions in methane from this sector. These measures incentivize affected facilities to reduce emissions in advance of compliance requirements under the oil and gas standards.

As directed by Congress in the IRA, the Waste Emissions Charge is calculated with the input of data reported to EPA under subpart W of the Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program. In May 2024 EPA published a [final rule \(pdf\)](#) revising subpart W to increase the accuracy of reported methane emissions from the oil and natural gas industry.

In addition to creating the Waste Emissions Charge, the Inflation Reduction Act provides more than \$1 billion to help monitor, measure, quantify, and reduce methane emissions from the oil and gas sector. Through the Methane Emissions Reduction Program, EPA is partnering with DOE to provide financial and technical assistance to promote the adoption of available and innovative technologies — including funds to mitigate emissions at low-producing conventional wells and other oil and gas infrastructure, to support methane monitoring and measurement nationwide, and to provide transparent emissions data to impacted communities.

The Waste Emissions Charge and MERP's funding opportunities, together with EPA's standards under the Clean Air Act, will advance the adoption of cost-effective technologies, reduce wasteful practices, and yield significant economic and environmental benefits, while driving continued innovation in methane detection, monitoring, and mitigation techniques.

For more information, please visit the [Methane Emissions Reduction Program website](#).

Source: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

EPA Highlights Progress Achieved to Reduce Waste and Conserve Resources on America Recycles Day

Nov. 15, on America Recycles Day, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is highlighting progress achieved on actions in its “National Recycling Strategy” through implementation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. As a key agency in the Biden-Harris administration’s efforts to build a circular economy, EPA is joining the White House to recognize America Recycles Day with a [Presidential Proclamation](#). Since 1997, EPA has celebrated the nation’s progress on recycling, and this year, EPA is encouraging organizations and individuals to continue expanding the ways they reduce, reuse and recycle. Together with investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, EPA’s work has helped to transform recycling and solid waste management across the country while creating jobs and strengthening the nation’s economy.

“President Biden’s commitment to upgrading our nation’s recycling infrastructure has supported local economies, created good-paying American jobs, and provided stronger public health protections for communities across our nation,” **said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan**. “As we celebrate America Recycles Day, let us remember that recycling is a simple and effective way to make a difference.”

Thanks to the historic [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) signed three years ago today, EPA received the largest recycling investment in 30 years to fund the [Solid Waste Infrastructure for Recycling \(SWIFR\)](#) and [Recycling Education and Outreach \(REO\) grant programs](#). These recycling grants tackle consumer confusion and outdated recycling infrastructure, the largest barriers to proper recycling, and support implementation of EPA’s “[National Recycling Strategy](#).” The 164 grants EPA has selected so far are also an investment in overburdened communities where waste management facilities are most concentrated – 156 of these grants are already awarded – 56 to states and territories, 24 through REO, 24 to communities, and 52 to Tribes and Intertribal Consortia. As a result of SWIFR funding, several states are conducting their first-ever solid waste management plans and waste characterization studies, and some are creating market development strategies.

One of the most effective ways to protect the environment is to reduce waste. The United Nations’ International Resource Panel found that natural resource extraction and processing contribute to over 55% of all global greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change. EPA’s focus is on preventing waste through reduction and reuse strategies and supporting a circular economy, an approach that keeps materials and products in use for as long as possible.

In June of 2024, EPA released a joint “[National Strategy for Reducing Food Loss and Waste and Recycling Organics](#)” with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Food and Drug Administration to prevent the loss and waste of food and increase the recycling of organic materials, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, save households and businesses money, and build cleaner communities. Additionally, EPA published reports [analyzing and quantifying the impacts of wasted food](#).

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EPA Highlights Progress Achieved to Reduce Waste and Conserve Resources on America Recycles Day (continued)

EPA also recently hosted working sessions to develop best practices and battery labeling guidelines to increase battery recycling—one of EPA’s latest efforts to reduce landfill waste and recover valuable materials from used products. The best practices and guidelines aim to increase the collection and recycling of used consumer electric and portable batteries, vehicle batteries, and storage and industrial batteries.

In September 2024, EPA announced additional SWIFR funding opportunities for [Tribes and intertribal consortia](#) and [communities](#), as well as additional funding through the [REO grant program](#). EPA anticipates announcing additional SWIFR funding for states and territories next year. These grants are covered programs under the Justice40 Initiative, which aims to deliver at least 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal climate, clean energy, affordable and sustainable housing, clean water, and other investments to disadvantaged communities.

Next, EPA is planning to publish the final “National Strategy to Prevent Plastic Pollution,” part three of the series on building a circular economy. In this latest strategy, EPA will share actions that governments, businesses, non-profits, and communities can take in the U.S. to eliminate the release of plastic waste into the environment and reduce the U.S. contribution to plastic pollution.

EPA offers many free, online resources, including:

- [Model Recycling Toolkit](#).
- [Composting Food Scraps in Your Community](#): A Social Marketing Toolkit.
- [Wasted Food Scale](#): Updated Recommendations.
- [Standardized Terms for Materials Accepted by Municipal Recycling Programs](#).
- [Creating Messages that Drive Behavior Change](#).
- [Recycling Infrastructure and Market Opportunities Map](#).

Visit the [EPA recycling webpage](#) to learn more ways to reduce, reuse and recycle.

For further information: EPA Press Office (press@epa.gov)

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Biden-Harris Administration Announces Nearly \$80 Million in Clean Ports Investments for the Port of Philadelphia as Part of Investing America Agenda

EPA's Clean Ports Program to fund 55 zero-emission port equipment, infrastructure, and planning projects across the nation to tackle climate change, reduce air pollution, promote good jobs, and advance environmental justice

As part of the Biden-Harris Administration's Investing in America agenda, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that the Philadelphia Regional Port Authority has been selected to receive nearly \$80 million through EPA's [Clean Ports Program](#) for the deployment of zero-emission port equipment and infrastructure, and climate and air quality planning.

- **Climate and Air Quality Planning - \$2,000,000:** To identify availability of terminal and near-terminal space, outline a strategy to power and deploy zero-emission equipment; community and stakeholder engagement to ensure public health; assess baseline emissions generated by terminal operations
- **Zero Emission Technology - \$77,650,965:** For electric cargo handling equipment and railcar mover, charging infrastructure, and electrical infrastructure upgrades

The grants are funded by President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act — the largest investment in combating climate change and promoting clean energy in history— and will advance environmental justice by reducing diesel air pollution from U.S. ports and surrounding communities while promoting good-paying and union jobs that help America's ports thrive.

"Our nation's ports are critical to creating opportunity here in America, offering good-paying jobs, moving goods, and powering our economy," **said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan.** "Today's historic \$3 billion investment builds on President Biden's vision of growing our economy while ensuring America leads in globally competitive solutions of the future. Delivering cleaner technologies and resources to U.S. ports will slash harmful air and climate pollution while protecting people who work in and live nearby ports communities."

"While our U.S. Ports are critical to the economy of the Mid-Atlantic region, they also have a significant impact on our environment," **said Adam Ortiz, EPA Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator.** "This once-in-a-generation effort to upgrade, modernize, and improve port equipment will have lasting positive impacts on all those who live and work on the East Coast."

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Biden-Harris Administration Announces Nearly \$80 Million in Clean Ports Investments for the Port of Philadelphia as Part of Investing America Agenda (continued)

Ports are vital to the U.S. economy and are responsible for moving goods and people throughout the country. At the same time, the port and freight equipment responsible for moving goods including trucks, locomotives, marine vessels, and cargo-handling equipment contribute to significant levels of diesel air pollution at and near port facilities. This pollution is especially harmful to nearby communities' health and contributes to climate change. The funds announced today will improve air quality at ports across the country by installing clean, zero-emission freight and ferry technologies along with associated infrastructure, eliminating more than 3 million metric tons of carbon pollution, equivalent to 391,220 homes' energy use for one year.

"I was proud to vote for the Biden-Harris administration's Inflation Reduction Act, a landmark clean-energy and health-care law, and this more than \$79 million in federal funding for our area is just the latest way it's benefiting Philadelphia and the region," **said Congressman Dwight Evans (PA-03)**

"The Port of Philadelphia is a critical driver of good-paying jobs for our region and a vital gateway for goods and passengers across the country," **said Congresswoman Mary Gay Scanlon (PA-05)**. "I'm so pleased to see funding from the Biden-Harris administration's Investing in America agenda continue to flow into our region, helping clean up pollution at our ports and improving air quality and public health in neighboring communities."

In February 2024, EPA announced two separate funding opportunities for U.S. ports – a Zero-Emission Technology Deployment Competition to directly fund zero-emission equipment and infrastructure to reduce mobile source emissions and a Climate and Air Quality Planning Competition to fund climate and air quality planning activities. The competitions closed in May 2024 with over \$8 billion in requests from applicants across the country seeking to advance next-generation, clean technologies at U.S. ports.

After a thorough and rigorous grant application review process, EPA selected 55 applications to receive this historic investment. Applications to the Clean Ports Program were evaluated in part on their workforce development efforts to ensure that projects will expand access to high-quality jobs. Grant selections also align with the Administration's national goal for a zero-emission freight sector, the National Blueprint for Transportation Decarbonization, and the 'all-of government' National Zero-Emission Freight Corridor Strategy.

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Biden-Harris Administration Announces Nearly \$80 Million in Clean Ports Investments for the Port of Philadelphia as Part of Investing America Agenda (continued)

Selected projects cover a wide range of human operated and human maintained equipment used at and around ports, with funds supporting **the purchase of battery-electric and hydrogen-powered equipment, including over 1,500 units of cargo handling equipment, 1,000 drayage trucks, 10 locomotives, and 20 vessels, as well as shore power systems, battery-electric and hydrogen vehicle charging and fueling infrastructure, and solar power generation.**

Initial estimates of tailpipe reductions from this new equipment are estimated to be over 3 million metric tons of CO₂, 12 thousand short tons of NO_x, and 200 short tons of PM_{2.5} in the first 10 years of operation. These estimates are based on initial counts of proposed zero-emission equipment and shore power installations and do not consider benefits from retiring older vehicles, among other factors. These simplified estimates were prepared using national default emissions and activity factors and will be refined over time with more detailed information from selectees.

In addition to protecting human health and the environment, the program will protect and grow good-paying and union port jobs, create new good-paying and union jobs in the domestic clean energy sector, and enhance U.S. economic competitiveness through the innovation, installation, maintenance, and operation of zero-emissions equipment and infrastructure. The program's historic investment in zero-emission port technology will also help promote and ensure the U.S. position as a global leader in clean technologies.

EPA's Clean Ports Program advances President Biden's [Justice40 Initiative](#), which aims to deliver 40% of the overall benefits of certain federal investments to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution. Disadvantaged communities will benefit from cleaner air and access to high quality jobs that will be created to operate zero emissions technologies at ports.

EPA ensured that near-port community engagement and equity considerations were at the forefront of the Clean Ports Program's design, including evaluating applications on the extent and quality of their projects' community engagement efforts. The program will also help to ensure that meaningful community engagement and emissions reduction planning become a

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Biden-Harris Administration Announces Nearly \$80 Million in Clean Ports Investments for the Port of Philadelphia as Part of Investing America Agenda (continued)

part of port industry standard practices by building on the successes of EPA's Ports Initiative and the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act programs. These programs have previously invested over \$196 million to implement 207 diesel emissions reduction projects at ports with an additional \$88 million to multi-sector projects that involve ports and have encouraged strong community-port [collaboration](#).

The agency anticipates making awards once all legal, statutory, and administrative requirements are satisfied. Selectees will work with EPA over the coming months to finalize project plans before receiving final awards and moving into the implementation phase. Project implementation will occur over the next three to four years depending on the scope of each project.

To learn more about the Clean Ports Program tentatively selected applications, please visit the [Clean Ports Program Selections webpage](#).

Source: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

EPA Strengthens Standards to Protect Children from Exposure to Lead Paint Dust

EPA Strengthens Standards to Protect Children from Exposure to Lead Paint Dust

Marking National Lead Poisoning Prevention Week, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency finalized stronger requirements for identifying and cleaning up lead paint dust in pre-1978 homes and childcare facilities. The final standards are the latest action in President Biden's whole-of-government strategy to protect families and children from lead exposure. Children are especially vulnerable to the impacts of lead exposure, which can cause irreversible and life-long health effects, including behavioral problems, lower IQ, slowed growth and more. In adults, exposure can cause increased risk of cardiovascular disease and may cause cancer. EPA estimates that this rule will reduce the lead exposures of up to nearly 1.2 million people every year, of which 178,000 to 326,000 are children under the age of six.

The stronger standards deliver on the Biden-Harris administration's [Lead Pipe and Paint Action Plan](#), announced by Vice President Kamala Harris in December of 2021, which harnesses the full breadth of the Administration's authorities to protect children from the dangers of lead exposure, including historic investments secured by President Biden. This action also advances EPA's strategy to address the significant disparities in lead exposure along racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines.

"Too often our children, the most vulnerable residents of already overburdened communities, are the most profoundly impacted by the toxic legacy of lead-based paint," **said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan**. "EPA is getting the lead out of communities nationwide. These protections will reduce lead exposures for hundreds of thousands of people every year, helping kids grow up healthy and meet their full potential."

"We can all breathe a little easier now that the EPA has significantly lowered its dust lead standard to protect children," **said Peggy Shepard, Co-Founder & Executive Director of WE ACT for Environmental Justice**. "For decades, the academic and advocacy communities have understood that there is no safe level of lead in a child's blood. I am a New Yorker whose state leads the nation in cases of children with elevated blood levels. I am an environmental justice leader based in Harlem where studies show that Black children living below the poverty line are twice as likely to suffer from lead poisoning as poor white children. I applaud EPA's action to address this deadly challenge for our children and families."

There is no safe level of lead exposure, particularly for children. In children, lead can severely harm mental and physical development, slow down learning, and irreversibly damage the brain. In adults, lead can cause increased blood pressure, heart disease, decreased kidney function, and may cause cancer. If someone is impacted by lead exposure, there is no known antidote, according to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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EPA Strengthens Standards to Protect Children from Exposure to Lead Paint Dust (continued)

Today's final rule reduces the level of lead in dust that EPA considers hazardous to any reportable level measured by an EPA-recognized laboratory. The rule also lowers the amount of lead that can remain in dust on floors, window sills and window troughs after a lead paint abatement occurs to the levels listed below, the lowest levels that can be reliably and quickly measured in laboratories. This will result in significant reductions in exposures when compared to prior standards. The rule is strengthening these standards from:

- 10 micrograms per square foot ($\mu\text{g}/\text{ft}^2$) to 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ft}^2$ for floors,
- 100 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ft}^2$ to 40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ft}^2$ for window sills, and
- 400 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ft}^2$ to 100 $\mu\text{g}/\text{ft}^2$ for window troughs.

These levels reflect standards implemented by New York City in 2021. The new standards will better protect children and communities from the harmful effects resulting from exposure to dust generated from lead paint.

Property owners, lead-based paint professionals and government agencies may identify dust-lead hazards in residential and childcare facilities built before 1978 after learning that a child living there has a high blood lead level, or because of requirements for housing receiving federal funding, among other reasons. If lead abatement is needed, EPA's [Lead-Based Paint Activities Program](#) requires individuals and firms performing the abatement to be certified and follow specific work practices. Following an abatement, testing is then required to ensure dust-lead levels are below the new post-abatement dust lead action levels before the abatement can be considered complete.

Although the federal government banned lead-based paint for residential use in 1978, it is estimated that 31 million pre-1978 houses still contain lead-based paint, and 3.8 million of them have one or more children under the age of six living there. Lead-contaminated dust is one of the most common causes of elevated blood lead levels in children, and even low levels of exposure can be harmful. Lead dust commonly results when lead-based paint deteriorates or is disturbed. Due to normal behaviors such as crawling and hand-to-mouth activities, young children are particularly at risk of higher exposure to ingesting this lead-containing dust.

Communities of color and lower income communities are often at greater risk of lead exposure because deteriorated lead-based paint is more likely to be found in lower-income areas. Communities of color can also face greater risk of lead-based paint exposure due to the legacy of redlining, historic racial segregation in housing, and reduced access to environmentally safe and affordable housing.

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EPA Strengthens Standards to Protect Children from Exposure to Lead Paint Dust (continued)

Earlier this month, EPA issued a [final rule](#) requiring drinking water systems across the country to identify and replace lead pipes within 10 years. EPA [also announced](#) \$2.6 billion in newly available drinking water infrastructure funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which is available to support lead pipe replacement and inventory projects. Together, these and other actions taken under the [Biden-Harris Administration](#) will help protect Americans from exposure to lead.

Background

Historically, EPA set the same standard for the level of lead found in dust from old paint that has to be reported and the amount of lead that can remain in dust on floors, window sills and window troughs after a lead paint abatement occurs. This action decouples the two levels, which were last updated in 2019 and 2021, respectively. This is being done in accordance with a May 2021 Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals opinion, which explains that dust-lead reportable levels (previously called dust-lead hazard standards) must be based solely on health factors, while the dust-lead action levels (previously called dust-lead clearance levels) must consider the additional factors of safety, effectiveness and reliability. Today's rule aligns both standards with the best available science, further strengthening EPA's efforts to protect children from lead hazards.

EPA will host a public webinar to provide an overview of the rule on Thursday, Dec. 5, 2024, at 2:00 p.m. ET. Please use the [registration link](#) to register for this webinar.

Learn more about EPA's dust-lead standards and the upcoming public webinar on this [final rulemaking](#).

For further information: EPA Press Office (press@epa.gov)

Source: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency