

ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

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MEMORANDUM

April 20, 2010

To: Members of the Health Subcommittee

Fr: Health Subcommittee Staff

Re: Subcommittee Hearing on “The Environment and Human Health: HHS’ Role”

On Earth Day, Thursday, April 22, 2010, at 9:30 a.m. in room 2123 of the Rayburn House Office Building, the Subcommittee on Health will hold a hearing entitled “The Environment and Human Health: HHS’s Role.” The hearing will examine, with testimony from two key agency directors, how the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is studying, tracking, and addressing the effects of environmental factors on human health and illness.

I. The Major HHS Agencies Involved in Environmental Health Issues

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is responsible for research into the connections between the environment and human health. It was established in 1966 as the Division of Environmental Health Sciences, and became an institute in 1969.¹ NIEHS supports both in-house and extramural research on a range of topics related to environmental health science, including epidemiology, biostatistics, molecular genetics, reproductive and developmental technology, and population studies.² Current NIEHS priorities include endocrine disruptors, cancer, air pollution and asthma, and pesticides and health.³

¹ National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, *About NIEHS* (online at www.niehs.nih.gov/about/).

² National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences Fact Sheet (online at www.niehs.nih.gov/health/docs/niehs-overview.pdf).

³ *Id.*

The National Toxicology Program (NTP), housed at NIEHS, was established in 1978.⁴ Its primary role is identification of the effects of chemicals of public health concern and determination of the levels at which such effects occur.⁵ NTP conducts testing programs, develops testing methods, and provides information on chemical toxicity to other agencies, scientists, physicians, and the public.⁶

The National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH), which is part of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), was established in 1992 to promote the prevention of disease, disability and death caused by environmental factors, continuing the work of an earlier center established in 1980.⁷ NCEH conducts research and surveillance, and develops and conducts intervention to reduce environmental health risks.⁸ NCEH also develops and disseminates recommendations based on its research, and trains environmental health officials at all levels of government.⁹

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, also at CDC, was created in 1980 to undertake the public health provisions of the “Superfund” Act, which mandates the removal or cleanup of inactive or abandoned hazardous waste sites.¹⁰ Subsequent legislation gave the agency a broader set of responsibilities, including public health assessments at active hazardous waste facilities; assisting the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in assessing specific substances; creating and maintaining toxicology databases; providing information; and educating the medical community.¹¹

⁴ National Toxicology Program, *History of the NTP* (online at ntp.niehs.nih.gov/?objectid=720163C9-BDB7-CEBA-FE4B970B9E72BF54).

⁵ National Toxicology Program main web page (online at ntp.niehs.nih.gov/?objectid=7201637B-BDB7-CEBA-F57E39896A08F1BB).

⁶ National Toxicology Program, *supra* note 4.

⁷ National Center for Environmental Health, *A Brief History of NCEH* (online at www.cdc.gov/nceh/history/default.htm). The Center for Environmental Health, established in 1980, was originally responsible for both environmental health issues and injury control. In 1992 CDC divided it into two separate centers, the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control and the National Center for Environmental Health.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ ATSDR, *ATSDR Background and Congressional Mandates* (online at www.atsdr.cdc.gov/about/congress.html). The official name of the “Superfund” Act is the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980, also known as CERCLA.

¹¹ *Id.*

II. Witnesses

Dr. Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D

Director

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and the National Toxicology Program

Dr. Henry Falk, MD, MPH

Acting Director

National Center for Environmental Health, and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry