

Conservation Committee Report

Volume 26 Issue 5

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 Finalizes Stronger Chemical Risk Evaluation Process to Protect Workers and Communities

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency finalized a rule that strengthens its process for conducting risk evaluations on chemicals under the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA). These improvements to EPA's

processes advance the goals of this important chemical safety law, ensure that TSCA risk evaluations comprehensively account for the risks associated with a chemical, and provide a solid foundation for protecting public health, including workers and communities, from toxic

chemicals. The rule also includes changes to enhance environmental protections in communities overburdened by pol-

lution, complementing the Biden-Harris Administration's ambitious [environmental justice agenda](#).

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EPA Marks Asthma Awareness Month and Honors National Leader in the Fight Against Asthma Disparities

Maine Asthma Prevention and Control Program Recognized as National Model

Every year in May, EPA marks Asthma Awareness

Month to raise national awareness of asthma and to highlight leading programs across the nation that serve as models for delivering outstanding improvements in asthma care and quality of life for people with asthma.

"Growing up with respiratory challenges in North Carolina, I know all too well the struggle that millions of Americans suffer daily. Asthma is a public health issue, an economic issue, and an

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EPA Finalizes Stronger Chemical Risk Evaluation Process to Protect Workers and Communities (continued)

“Everything we do to protect our nation, including workers and communities, from toxic chemical exposures must be comprehensive and grounded in strong science,” said Assistant Administrator for the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention Michal Freedhoff. “This rule charts the path for our risk evaluations to ensure we meet the core objective to protect public health under our nation’s premier chemical safety law, which will in turn lead to rules that workers and communities can count on to keep them safe.”

The 2016 TSCA amendments require that EPA establish a procedural framework rule on the process for conducting chemical risk evaluations. TSCA risk evaluations are the basis for EPA’s risk management rules that protect people and the environment from harmful chemicals. Although EPA finalized a risk evaluation framework rule in 2017, that rule was challenged in court. The United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit remanded several provisions of the rule back to the agency for reconsideration. Another aspect of the litigation, related to the policy to categorically exclude the consideration of exposures from breathing polluted air or drinking contaminated water, was deemed not ripe for review by the court.

EPA’s final rule includes revisions made to respond to the court’s ruling, as well as several changes to improve EPA’s process for TSCA risk evaluations, including:

- Consideration of real-world exposure scenarios such as multiple exposure pathways (e.g., in air and water) to the same chemical, and combined risks from multiple chemicals when EPA has the scientific information to do so, which may be particularly important for communities who face greater exposures or susceptibilities to chemicals than the rest of the general population.
- A requirement that risk evaluations are comprehensive in scope and do not exclude conditions of use or exposure pathways.
- Clarifications to ensure EPA appropriately considers risks to all workers in its risk evaluations.
- Consideration of chemical uses that may be required for national security or critical infrastructure by other Federal agencies.
- Assurance the agency will continue to use the best available science to conduct risk evaluations, that decisions are based on the weight of the scientific evidence and that risk evaluations will be peer reviewed in accordance with both federal and EPA guidance.
- Discussion of chemical-specific fit-for-purpose approaches that allow for varying types and levels of analysis so that risk evaluations focus less rigorously on the conditions of use that are expected to pose low potential risk and can reliably be completed within the timeframes required by the statute.

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EPA Finalizes Stronger Chemical Risk Evaluation Process to Protect Workers and Communities (continued)

- A clear requirement for risk evaluations to culminate in a single risk determination on the chemical substance, rather than on individual chemical conditions of use in isolation, and improved communications regarding the uses that significantly contribute to the unreasonable risk.
- New procedures and criteria for whether and how EPA will revise scope and risk evaluation documents, to improve transparency.
- Adjustments to the process for submission and review of manufacturer requests for risk evaluations of chemicals to better align with the process and timeline associated with EPA-initiated risk evaluations, while also ensuring that the agency can use the authorities provided under the law for gathering any needed additional information on such chemicals.
- A requirement that risk evaluations must explicitly consider overburdened communities when identifying potentially exposed and susceptible populations as relevant to the risk evaluation.

EPA [announced](#) many of the changes included in the final rule in 2021 and has incorporated them into TSCA risk evaluation activities over the past three years. EPA then proposed a revised procedural framework rule in October 2023 and, after carefully considering public comment on the proposed rule, released today's final rule. The procedures outlined in the rule apply to all risk evaluations initiated 30 days after the date of publication of the final rule or later. For risk evaluations that are currently in process, EPA expects to apply the new procedures to those risk evaluations to the extent practicable, taking into consideration the statutory requirements and deadlines.

Learn more about the [TSCA risk evaluation process](#).

For further information: press@epa.gov

Source: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

EPA Marks Asthma Awareness Month and Honors National Leader in the Fight Against Asthma Disparities (continued)

environmental issue that impacts the entire country, especially low-income and minority communities,” **said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan.** “That’s why EPA is taking action to slash harmful pollution and raise awareness of the tools available for communities to manage asthma, control symptoms, and improve health.”

Asthma is a major public health issue that affects more than 25 million Americans, including four million children, and disproportionately affects certain racial and ethnic groups. The estimated economic impact of asthma is more than \$80 billion per year from direct and indirect costs, such as missed school and workdays.

Fortunately, there are steps people can take as part of a comprehensive approach to manage their asthma, control symptoms, and improve health. These include following a personalized action plan to help manage asthma and avoiding triggers that can exacerbate symptoms.

EPA is taking action to reduce the pollution that causes asthma attacks while more communities, with EPA support, deploy approaches to improve the lives of people with asthma, especially in minority and low-income communities.

People can control asthma symptoms and improve health with three straightforward strategies:

- 1. Identify and avoid indoor environmental asthma triggers.** Dust mites, secondhand smoke, mold, pests, pet dander and other allergens and contaminants in homes, schools and other indoor spaces can trigger asthma attacks. Work with your health care provider to identify and avoid your personal indoor asthma triggers.
- 2. Pay attention to outdoor air quality.** Ozone and particle pollution can cause or worsen asthma attacks, even indoors. Check local air quality conditions at [AirNow.gov](https://airnow.gov) and download the EPA [AirNow](https://airnow.gov) app for your phone.
- 3. Create a personalized asthma action plan.** This will help you monitor your or your child’s asthma and take steps to reduce exposure to personal asthma triggers. Ask a health care provider to assist you in creating a plan.

During Asthma Awareness Month, EPA recognizes leading asthma management programs for their in-home interventions through the National Environmental Leadership Award in Asthma Management. The 2024 winner is the **Maine Asthma Prevention and Control Program.**

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EPA Marks Asthma Awareness Month and Honors National Leader in the Fight Against Asthma Disparities (continued)

Maine's program provides leadership and coordination for asthma care and service delivery statewide. One of MAPC's initiatives is the In-Home Asthma Education Program, an innovative, home-based asthma program for adults, children and caregivers who, despite adequate medical management, have asthma that was not well controlled. The program connects those most in need with environmental asthma remediation tools and community resources through health educators who are highly attuned to the disparities that exist in asthma management.

EPA works year-round to promote understanding of asthma triggers, as a part of comprehensive asthma management, through research, education and outreach. With support from EPA, more communities are deploying approaches to improve the lives of people with asthma, especially in minority and low-income communities. A focus of EPA's work to reduce the scope of asthma is addressing the Indoor Environmental Determinants of Health. IEDOH are modifiable environmental factors indoors — such as household air pollution, the presence of pests, mold and moisture, chemicals and irritants — that influence risk and experience of chronic diseases, like asthma.

In addition to EPA's work in raising asthma awareness, EPA is taking action to reduce the pollution that causes asthma attacks. In recent months, EPA has finalized strengthened pollution standards for cars, trucks, and power plants — as well as stronger air quality standards for particulate matter — that once fully implemented, are anticipated to prevent tens of thousands of cases of asthma each year and avoid millions of lost days of school and work due to asthma symptoms.

With funding from President Biden's Investing in America Agenda, EPA is also working to improve the lives of millions of Americans by reducing pollution in neighborhoods where people live, work, play, and go to school. EPA is providing billions of dollars through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act to help schools and communities purchase clean school buses and clean heavy-duty vehicles that will reduce the air pollution from older diesel engines that is linked to asthma. Phasing out these older diesel engines, which disproportionately affect communities of color and Tribal communities, will ensure cleaner air for students and communities near these transportation routes. In addition, projects developed under the Inflation Reduction Act's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund and the Climate Pollution Reduction Grants Program are expected to fund projects that will provide even more clean-air benefits.

Throughout May, EPA will release content on social media and its [asthma website](#) to provide additional tips and guidance to improve well-being.

[Learn more about asthma and environmental triggers and read about the 2024 National Environmental Leadership Award winner.](#)

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

Source: U.S. EPA

Biden-Harris Administration Announces Over \$152 Million for Pennsylvania Lead Pipe Replacement to Advance Safe Drinking Water as Part of Investing in America Agenda

EPA announces latest round of funding toward President Biden's commitment to replace every lead pipe in the nation, protecting public health and helping to deliver safe drinking water

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced over \$152 million from President Biden's Investing in America agenda to help Pennsylvania identify and replace lead service lines, preventing exposure to lead in drinking water. Lead can cause a range of serious health impacts, including irreversible harm to brain development in children. To protect children and families, President Biden has committed to replacing every lead pipe in the country. Today's announcement, funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and available through EPA's successful Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF), takes another major step to advance this work and the Administration's commitment to environmental justice. This funding builds on the Administration's [Lead Pipe and Paint Action Plan](#) and EPA's [Get the Lead Out Initiative](#).

Working collaboratively, EPA and the State Revolving Funds are advancing the President's Justice40 Initiative to ensure that 40% of overall benefits from certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution. Lead exposure disproportionately affects communities of color and low-income families. The total funding announced through this program to date is expected to replace up to 1.7 million lead pipes nationwide, securing clean drinking water for countless families.

"Across our region, states are getting boosts from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that will improve lives, strengthen communities, and protect our most vulnerable populations," **said EPA Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator Adam Ortiz**. "This funding brings us much closer to replacing all lead service lines throughout the nation."

"The Pennsylvania constitution guarantees the right to clean drinking water, but lead pipes pose critical health concerns to families across the Commonwealth," **said U.S. Senator Bob Casey (PA)**. "Thanks to the infrastructure law, Pennsylvania will receive yet another round of funding to replace dangerous lead service lines. With this funding, we are restoring trust in our water supply, so that no family needs to think twice about drinking from the tap."

"It's just commonsense that we need to provide clean drinking water to all communities in Pennsylvania and across the country," **said U.S. Senator John Fetterman (D-PA)**. "President Biden understands this. That's why he's prioritized investing in water infrastructure. These federal dollars will ensure that more forgotten communities across the commonwealth will have access to safe and quality drinking water."

"I proudly voted for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and I'm pleased to see the Biden-Harris Administration once again using this law to deliver much-needed funding for Pennsylvania," **said Congressman Dwight Evans (PA-3)**.

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Biden-Harris Administration Announces Over \$152 Million for Pennsylvania Lead Pipe Replacement to Advance Safe Drinking Water as Part of Investing in America Agenda (continued)

"Every Pennsylvanian should be able to turn on the tap and know that their drinking water is safe," **said Congresswoman Mary Gay Scanlon (PA-5)**. "I'm glad to see another wave of clean water infrastructure funding made possible by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law flowing into Pennsylvania to protect our children and families from lead in drinking water."

"Americans have a right to safe drinking water," **said Congressman Brendan Boyle (PA-2)**. "I voted for this infrastructure funding to begin the process of replacing thousands of miles of lead pipes in the State of Pennsylvania and across the nation. Philadelphia is home to some of the state's oldest water service lines. I welcome this lead pipe replacement effort from President Biden and commend him on leading the way to safer and healthier water through his Lead Pipe and Paint Action Plan."

"Removing lead pipes is about protecting kids and making sure that all of our communities have safe, clean drinking water folks can count on," **said Congressman Chris Deluzio (PA-17)**. "With this \$152 million investment for lead pipe removal across the Commonwealth, President Biden's Infrastructure Law is once again stepping up to improve our health and safety."

President Biden's Bipartisan [Infrastructure Law](#) invests a historic \$15 billion to identify and replace lead service lines. The law mandates that 49% of funds provided through the DWSRF General Supplemental Funding and DWSRF Lead Service Line Replacement Funding must be provided as grants and forgivable loans to disadvantaged communities, a crucial investment for communities that have been underinvested in for too long. EPA projects a national total of 9 million lead services lines across the country, based on data collected from the updated 7th Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment. The funding announced today will be provided specifically for lead service line identification and replacement and will help every state and territory fund projects to remove lead pipes and reduce exposure to lead from drinking water.

The Lead Service Line-specific formula used to allot these funds allows states to receive financial assistance commensurate with their need as soon as possible, furthering public health protection nationwide. The formula and allotments are based on need — meaning that states with more projected lead service lines receive proportionally more funding.

Alongside the funding announced today, EPA is also releasing a [new memorandum](#) that clarifies how states can use this and other funding to most effectively reduce exposure to lead in drinking water. Additionally, EPA has developed [new outreach documents](#) to help water systems educate their customers on drinking water issues, health impacts of lead exposure, service line ownership, and how customers can support the identification of potential lead service lines in their homes.

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Biden-Harris Administration Announces Over \$152 Million for Pennsylvania Lead Pipe Replacement to Advance Safe Drinking Water as Part of Investing in America Agenda (continued)

To view stories about how the unprecedented investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law are transforming communities across the country, visit EPA's [Investing in America's Water Infrastructure Story Map](#). To read more about some additional projects that are underway, see EPA's recently released [Quarterly Report on Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#) Funded Clean Water and Drinking Water SRF projects and explore the [State Revolving Funds Public Portal](#).

Today's allotments are based on EPA's updated 7th Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment (DWINSA) including an assessment of newly submitted information. To date, this is the best available data collected and assessed on service line materials in the United States. Later this summer, EPA will release an addendum to the 7th DWINSA Report to Congress which will include the updated lead service line projections. EPA anticipates initiating data collection, which will include information on lead service lines, for the 8th DWINSA in 2025.

For more information, including state-by-state allotment of 2024 funding, and a breakdown of EPA's lead Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, please visit [EPA's Drinking Water website](#).

Source: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Biden-Harris Administration Announces Final Rule to Cut Methane Emissions, Strengthen and Update Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting for the Oil and Gas Sector

Revisions to EPA's Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program authorized by Congress will bring greater transparency and accountability for methane emissions from oil and natural gas facilities, one of the major drivers of climate change

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency issued a final rule to strengthen, expand, and update methane emissions reporting requirements for petroleum and natural gas systems under EPA's Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program, as required by President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act. The final revisions will ensure greater transparency and accountability for methane pollution from oil and natural gas facilities by improving the accuracy of annual emissions reporting from these operations. Oil and natural gas facilities are the nation's largest industrial source of methane, a climate "super pollutant" that is many times more potent than carbon dioxide and is responsible for approximately one third of the warming from greenhouse gases occurring today.

EPA's latest action complements the Biden-Harris Administration's whole-of-government initiative to slash methane emissions from every sector of the economy under the U.S. Methane Emissions Reduction Plan. In 2023 alone, the Administration took nearly 100 actions, with coordination by the White House Methane Task Force, to bolster methane detection and reduce methane pollution from oil and gas operations, landfills, abandoned mines, agriculture, industry, and buildings.

The final rule updating the Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program is a key component of the Inflation Reduction Act's Methane Emissions Reduction Program, as designed by Congress to help states, industry, and communities implement recently finalized Clean Air Act methane standards and slash methane emissions from the oil and gas sector. The Biden-Harris Administration is also mobilizing over \$1 billion in financial and technical assistance to accelerate the transition to no- and low- emitting oil and gas technologies, as part of broad efforts to cut wasteful methane emissions.

"As we implement the historic climate programs under President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, EPA is applying the latest tools, cutting edge technology, and expertise to track and measure methane emissions from the oil and gas industry," **said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan**. "Together, a combination of strong standards, good monitoring and reporting, and historic investments to cut methane pollution will ensure the U.S. leads in the global transition to a clean energy economy."

Recent studies reveal that actual emissions from petroleum and natural gas systems are much greater than what has historically been reported to the GHGRP. This rule addresses that gap, including by facilitating the use of satellite data to identify super-emitters and quantify large emission events, requiring direct monitoring of key emission sources, and updating the methods for calculation.

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Biden-Harris Administration Announces Final Rule to Cut Methane Emissions, Strengthen and Update Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting for the Oil and Gas Sector (continued)

Together these changes support complete and accurate reporting and respond to Congress's directive for the measurement of methane emissions to rely on empirical data.

Today's announcement is EPA's latest step in tackling methane emissions that are fueling climate change, building on the agency's recently finalized Clean Air Act standards to sharply reduce methane and other harmful air pollutants from the oil and natural gas industry, promote the use of cutting-edge methane detection technologies, and deliver significant economic and public health benefits from methane emissions reductions. That rule established a Super-Emitter Program to help detect large leaks and releases, and today's reporting rule will require owners and operators to quantify and report the emissions detected through that Program to help close the gap between observed methane emissions and reported emissions.

The final subpart W rule will dramatically improve the quality of emissions data reported from oil and natural gas operations, with provisions that improve the quantification of methane emissions, incorporate advances in methane emissions measurement technology, and streamline compliance with other EPA regulations. For the first time, EPA is allowing for the use of advanced technologies such as satellites to help quantify emissions in subpart W. In addition, EPA is finalizing new methodologies that allow for the use of empirical data for quantifying emissions, including options added in response to public comments on the proposed rule. The final rule also allows for the optional earlier use of empirical data calculation methodologies for facilities that prefer to use them to quantify 2024 emissions. These changes will improve transparency and expand the options for owners and operators to submit empirical data to demonstrate their effort to reduce methane emissions and identify whether a Waste Emissions Charge is owed, based on thresholds set by Congress.

Advanced measurement technologies, and their use for annual quantification of emissions, are evolving rapidly. EPA is committed to transparent and continual improvements to its programs to account for these advancements while ensuring reporting is accurate and complete. The agency intends to take the following steps to gather further information about advanced measurement technologies and to inform potential regulatory changes or other standard setting programs that encourage the use of more accurate and comprehensive measurement strategies:

- This summer, EPA will solicit input on the use of advanced measurement data and methods in subpart W by issuing a Request for Information and opening a non-regulatory docket, including specific questions and topics on which EPA seeks input from the public.

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Biden-Harris Administration Announces Final Rule to Cut Methane Emissions, Strengthen and Update Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting for the Oil and Gas Sector (continued)

EPA intends to use the feedback received to consider whether it is appropriate to undertake further rulemaking addressing the use of advanced measurement technologies in subpart W, beyond the role for these technologies that is already provided in today's rule.

- EPA also seeks to continuously update its knowledge about new measurement and detection technologies, and to elicit input from stakeholders and experts about how such advances should inform EPA's regulations. To keep pace with this dynamic field, EPA plans to undertake a solicitation or engagement for information about advanced measurement and detection technologies (in the form of a Request for Information, workshop, or similar mechanism) on at least a biennial basis. These engagements will enable EPA to learn about technological advances and the extent to which there is robust information about their accuracy, reliability, and appropriateness for use in a regulatory reporting program.

For more information about this action, please visit the [GHG Reporting Program Rulemaking Resources webpage](#).

Background on the Methane Emissions Reduction Program in the Inflation Reduction Act

Methane is a climate “super pollutant” that is more potent than carbon dioxide and responsible for approximately one third of the warming from greenhouse gases occurring today. The oil and natural gas sector is the largest industrial source of methane emissions in the United States. Quick reduction of these methane emissions is one of the most important and cost-effective actions the United States can take in the short term to slow the rate of rapidly rising global temperatures.

EPA issued a [final rule](#) in December 2023 to sharply reduce methane emissions and other harmful air pollution from new and existing oil and gas operations. In addition, EPA is working to implement the three-part framework of the Inflation Reduction Act's Methane Emissions Reduction Program.

First, EPA is partnering with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to utilize resources provided by Congress in the Inflation Reduction Act to provide [over \\$1 billion dollars in financial and technical assistance](#) to accelerate the transition to technologies that reduce methane emissions and may include funds for activities associated with marginal (i.e., low-producing) conventional wells, support for methane monitoring, and funding to help reduce methane emissions from oil and gas operations.

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Biden-Harris Administration Announces Final Rule to Cut Methane Emissions, Strengthen and Update Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting for the Oil and Gas Sector (continued)

Second, with today's announcement, as directed by Congress, EPA is updating subpart W of the [Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program](#) to ensure that reporting of methane emissions from oil and natural gas operations is based on empirical data and accurately reflects emissions.

Third, in January 2024 EPA [proposed a rule](#) to implement Congress' requirement for a Waste Emissions Charge. To take advantage of near-term opportunities for methane reductions while EPA and states work toward full implementation of the final oil and gas rule, Congress directed EPA to collect a charge on methane emissions from large oil and gas facilities that are high-emitting and wasteful, based on data submitted under subpart W.

Background about Greenhouse Gas Reporting Program Requirements for Petroleum and Natural Gas Sector

The GHGRP requires reporting of greenhouse gas data and other relevant information from large GHG emission sources, fuel and industrial gas suppliers, and CO₂ injection sites in the United States. Approximately 8,000 facilities are required to report their emissions annually, and the reported data are made available to the public in October of each year.

Under the GHGRP, owners or operators of facilities that contain petroleum and natural gas systems and emit 25,000 metric tons or more of GHGs per year (expressed as carbon dioxide equivalents) report GHG data to EPA. Owners or operators collect GHG data; calculate GHG emissions; and follow the specified procedures for quality assurance, missing data, recordkeeping, and reporting. Subpart W consists of emission sources in ten segments of the petroleum and natural gas industry.

[Learn more about greenhouse gas reporting requirements for petroleum and natural gas systems.](#)

For further information: press@epa.gov

Source: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

DEP Launches New Pilot Program To Reduce Errors, Speed Up Processing Time For Key Construction Permit

Under DEP's New Pilot Program, Applicants For Chapter 102 Permits In 10 Counties Will Meet With DEP Staff Before Applying For One Of The Most Common Construction Permits, With The Goal Of Reducing Errors On Applications And Speeding Up The Permitting Proc

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has announced the next step in efforts to modernize and improve its permitting process with a new 10-county pilot program to improve and accelerate the review process for construction stormwater discharge permits. The process improvements in this pilot will also better facilitate compliance with environmental laws and regulations. The pilot program is anticipated to reduce the average processing time for Chapter 102 Individual National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit applications by 73 business days.

"The goal with our permit modernization efforts is always processing permit applications in the most efficient way possible while still maintaining the high standards that Pennsylvanians expect and deserve from DEP," **said DEP Acting Secretary Jessica Shirley**. "The Chapter 102 Pilot Program aims to take a common permit and find ways to improve the process. DEP reviews more than 40,000 permit applications every year across all permit types, and we will take the lessons we learn from this pilot and see how we can apply them to other permits."

The pilot program will be available beginning May 1, 2024, for Chapter 102 Individual NPDES Permit applications for projects in Allegheny, Beaver, Bucks, Chester, Lebanon, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Montgomery, and York counties. During the pilot, the Conservation Districts in the listed counties will accept a maximum of three Individual NPDES permit applications per quarter for consideration under the pilot program. Full details of the pilot program are available on [DEP's Construction Stormwater page](#).

One of the requirements under the pilot program will be for prospective applicants to meet with Conservation District and/or DEP staff in two separate pre-application meetings where the District and DEP will assess the project's eligibility for the pilot program and assist the applicant with ensuring the application is complete. Applicants must also have a licensed professional prepare the stormwater plan and be retained throughout the project.

The Chapter 102 Pilot Program is one part of DEP's Permit Modernization efforts, which also include:

- Creating a quarterly Agriculture Permitting Stakeholder Roundtable to engage farmers, conservation district managers, owners, operators, producers, and consultants to collect feedback on permitting processes.

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DEP Launches New Pilot Program To Reduce Errors, Speed Up Processing Time For Key Construction Permit (continued)

- Formalizing a pre-application meeting process to better inform potential applicants of the permitting process and the specific permits they need. The [Permit Application Consultation Tool](#) (PACT) is available online.
- Undergoing User Experience (UX) research with key stakeholders that will provide useful insights into what they need and value during the application process. The goal of the customer experience initiative is to understand and improve the applicant's experience and reduce bottlenecks in review.

The Shapiro Administration has already made significant progress by improving or eliminating the long wait times to receive hundreds of permits, licenses, and certifications. In his first month in office, Governor Shapiro signed [Executive Order 2023-07](#) directing all state agencies to standardize timeframes for how they issue permits, licenses, and certifications, and directed his Administration to create this money-back guarantee tool to request refunds when the Commonwealth does not meet those timeframes. The Shapiro Administration's efforts to enhance and improve permitting are [showing early success](#) as DEP improves online permitting, online payment, and delivers on-time permit decisions.

DEP has successfully implemented the [PAYback program](#), the Shapiro Administration's online money-back guarantee system, and begun making significant progress in reducing backlogs and speeding up processing timelines. Through the PAYback program, led by the Office of Transformation and Opportunity (OTO) and the Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience (CODE PA), application fees are returned to applicants upon request if agencies don't take action on applications submitted on or after November 1, 2023 within set review timeframes. To date, DEP has not been required to refund a single application fee.

DEP has also pledged to address the backlog of permits that were overdue before the implementation of PAYback, and has seen a drastic reduction in the permit backlog. DEP has hired 15 new staff members dedicated to processing permits, thanks to investments from the 2023-24 budget signed into law by Governor Shapiro, and has utilized some staff working overtime when needed to address the backlog. Since hiring the additional staff members and cataloging and reviewing DEP's nearly 800 available types of permits, DEP has reduced the backlog of permits by nearly 900 individual permits – or 41 percent – as of March 1, 2024.

DEP aims to complete more modernization projects in the coming months. DEP will provide updates to the public on process improvements and related review timeliness data as projects are completed.

For more information on the Chapter 102 Pilot Program visit [DEP's Construction Stormwater page](#).

Source: The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

EPA Partners with Energy Communities to Support Community-Driven Energy Transition and Economic Revitalization Goals

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced two communities will receive technical assistance through the Energy Communities Technical Assistance Pilot program. EPA and recipient communities will work together to develop implementable action plans that promote environmental and economic revitalization as part of their energy sector transformation.

“The Inflation Reduction Act provides historic incentives to increase the supply of low-carbon and renewable energy generation for the national electric grid, and many energy communities can benefit from this complementary support to plan for and develop diversified economies,” **said Vicki Arroyo, EPA Associate Administrator for Policy.** “Our Energy Communities pilot is delivering assistance to communities to help make their vision a reality.”

Since 2021, EPA’s Office of Policy has played a leading role in the implementation of work conducted by the [Interagency Working Group on Coal and Power Plant Communities](#) and Economic Revitalization in coal-impacted communities, supporting [Rapid Response Teams](#) in six regions of the country.

The technical assistance will enhance community planning capacity to respond to urgent needs related to the energy transition, including leveraging private sector and philanthropic funding assistance, cleaning up and redeveloping abandoned power plant and mining areas, expanding community economic revitalization opportunities, together with workforce transition, and improving overall quality of life. The project will help communities develop the necessary planning to:

- Safely and equitably reuse and redevelop sites after coal mine and power plant closures.
- Boost opportunities for workforce development, training and apprenticeships.
- Improve partnerships between local and tribal governments, organizations, residents and the private sector to ensure local investments in clean energy and manufacturing are aligned with the community’s energy transition goals.

As part of the technical assistance, EPA staff will support projects in two communities, including convening federal, state, regional and local partners, and provide contractor support, for two-day in-person workshops. After holding two workshops and having conversations with all the Rapid Response Teams, EPA will develop a playbook for use by any energy community during transition planning and implementation. The playbook will identify initial steps that communities can take to plan their energy sector transition and economic diversification to create a more resilient and robust local economy.

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EPA Partners with Energy Communities to Support Community-Driven Energy Transition and Economic Revitalization Goals (continued)

Recipients of the Energy Communities Technical Assistance Pilot

Webster County, KY will use the Energy Communities Pilot to empower its community to identify and leverage resources and partnerships to encourage new and diverse economic opportunities. Webster County is still experiencing the economic effects of its last mine closure in 2019 and is home to extensive abandoned mine land which the community would like to see rehabilitated and put to alternative uses.

“Our community has taken several strides toward revitalization and through the Energy Communities Pilot, we’re hoping to take steps toward giving current residents and future generations reason to stay in Webster County and have choices for a thriving economic future,” **said Steve Henry, Webster County Judge Executive.**

The Hopi Tribe had an economy centered around coal-related operations but the closure of the Navajo Generating Station in 2019 led to significant job and revenue loss. The Hopi Utilities Corporation was chartered by the Hopi Tribal Council in 2017 to address energy and water issues on the Reservation. The community intends to use the Energy Communities Pilot process to focus on key projects in alignment with its goals of enhancing energy sovereignty and improving energy access and reliability.

“We are rewriting Hopi Tribe’s energy story,” **said Timothy Nuvangyaoma, Hopi Tribal Chairman.** “The technical assistance resources provided by the program will help the Hopi Utilities Corporation engage our community and partners in workshops to make progress on leveraging the Tribe’s strengthened internal capacity, workforce and modern infrastructure to spark economic development and environmental and energy security.”

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

Source: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

INVESTING IN PENNSYLVANIA STATE PARKS AND FORESTS

Pennsylvania's system of state parks and forests contains not only natural areas, but many roads, bridges, and structures -- most of which were built more than 50 years ago.

In his first budget, Governor Josh Shapiro secured \$112 million to invest in park and forest infrastructure -- the single largest investment in decades.

All that funding is currently allocated for projects that are in design, bidding, and construction in work overseen by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources **Bureau of Facility, Design, and Construction**.

Infrastructure investments are necessary to:

- Safely welcome millions of visitors
- Comply with modern requirements
- Ensure our park and forest systems remain national leaders
- Provide a broad array of outdoor experiences that anchor Pennsylvania's \$17 billion outdoor recreation economy.

"Let's invest in our entire park system and give the people what they want -- more opportunities to enjoy the outdoors and spend time with their friends and families," Governor Shapiro said when introducing his 2023-2024 budget.

Shapiro Administration And Partners Celebrate Turtle Creek Watershed Stream Restoration, Investments, And Water Quality Improvements

Stream Delisting Highlights The Importance Of Strong Partnerships In Restoring The Chesapeake Bay Watershed

The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA), and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) joined the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC), Senator Gene Yaw, Senator Scott Martin, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy, and the Chesapeake Conservancy to celebrate portions of the Turtle Creek watershed in southeastern Union County being removed, or “delisted” from the federal Clean Water Act impaired waters list. Stream delisting and improving water quality in Pennsylvania is a long-term goal for the Shapiro Administration, including in Pennsylvania’s portion of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

“We are proud to showcase the significant accomplishments made to improve Turtle Creek and the surrounding watershed. Restoring water quality and habitat while maintaining the watershed as a working agricultural landscape was no small undertaking, and it is yielding incredible results,” **said DEP Acting Secretary Jessica Shirley**. “The Turtle Creek watershed is a prime example of how strong partnerships, innovation, and sustained and strategic investments have restored local streams. This success would not have been possible without our state and local agency partners, including the Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy and county conservation districts. Together, we’ll restore more streams and protect more watersheds across Pennsylvania.”

The Union County Conservation District hosted attendees for an informational session on Turtle Creek watershed projects through an innovative block grant model using Growing Greener and other funds. Leaders discussed the importance of investing in local water quality.

“Turtle Creek is evidence that Pennsylvania’s investments in cleaner water and healthier soil are working,” **said PDA Secretary Russell Redding**. “Pennsylvania is a national leader in preserving prime farmland and in adopting innovative farming practices that restore our waterways and soil. Keeping us a national leader is one reason Governor Josh Shapiro has proposed investing \$10 million in a new Agriculture Innovation and Conservation Fund that will make successes like we’re celebrating today happen more often, and ensure clean, healthy water to support healthy families and healthy farms in the future.”

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Shapiro Administration And Partners Celebrate Turtle Creek Watershed Stream Restoration, Investments, And Water Quality Improvements (continued)

"The Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy is thrilled to see the northcentral stream partnership's work is creating cleaner water in Turtle Creek and other streams throughout the region," **said Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy Executive Director Renee Carey**. "It's a team effort to select, design, and implement each and every project. We're grateful to be part of a team that is improving local waterways one project at a time."

The tour continued at the Mary Beth and Frank Griffith Farm, where DEP Acting Secretary Shirley, PDA Secretary Redding, DCNR Policy Director Nicole Faraguna, PFBC Executive Director Timothy Schaeffer, Senator Yaw, Senator Scott Martin, and President of Chesapeake Conservancy Joel Dunn spoke about the importance of investing in the improvement, restoration, and protection of our local water.

"The success we celebrate today is just the start of what we can achieve when we apply funding in a more strategic way and align it with local goals and expertise. With the new Agricultural Conservation Assistance Program directing funding to agriculturally-impaired waters based on local priorities, and expansion of the Chesapeake Conservancy's data-driven guidance, we are equipping our local partners to push the gas pedal on their clean water efforts," **said Pennsylvania Delegation Chair, Chesapeake Bay Commission Senator Gene Yaw**.

"Today's event is recognition of the success of Pennsylvania's efforts to support healthier waterways, including the Clean Streams Fund, which is being held up as a national model for other states. We are proud to be stepping up with new ideas that are focused first on Pennsylvania's own waters, but also benefit our neighbors downstream," **said Appropriations Committee Chair Senator Scott Martin**.

"Today, at Turtle Creek, the conservation community has proven the power of partnership by implementing a strategic and focused approach to improving agriculturally impaired waterways, marking a turning point for the Chesapeake Bay restoration movement," **said Joel Dunn, President & CEO of the Chesapeake Conservancy**. "Now what we need is the will and additional resources to deploy this type of data-driven, successful strategy watershed-wide."

"The success story being written here on Turtle Creek is nothing short of remarkable and should inspire us to keep working to conserve, protect, and enhance our aquatic resources statewide," **said PFBC Executive Director Tim Schaeffer**. "By improving the water quality locally, the benefits are ultimately realized hundreds of miles downstream where fish and other aquatic life benefit throughout the Susquehanna River watershed and Chesapeake Bay."

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Shapiro Administration And Partners Celebrate Turtle Creek Watershed Stream Restoration, Investments, And Water Quality Improvements (continued)

The stream partnership has continued its ongoing commitment to Turtle Creek with a stream restoration, riparian buffer – plants that help protect the stream habitat – and pollinator habitat project at Turtle Creek Park in East Buffalo Township. The project was recently recognized with the Governor’s Award for Environmental Excellence.

“With a get stuff done mentality on this work, the Shapiro Administration has been able to partner with East Buffalo Township and community partners to quickly accomplish and develop a plan to improve water quality, protect wildlife habitats, and create new recreational opportunities at Turtle Creek,” **said DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn**. “This important work is critical in supporting the Chesapeake Bay watershed and the health and wellness in communities like East Buffalo Township. Let this initiative serve as a template for what we can do when we work together to support our environment.”

For more information about the ongoing Turtle Creek restoration effort, view the interactive story map at www.dep.pa.gov/turtlecreek.

Source: The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)

EPA Announces \$9M in Grants Available for Tribes and Eligible US Territories to Replace Diesel Equipment and Reduce Harmful Emissions

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced the availability of grant funding available to Tribal governments and eligible territories to implement projects aimed at reducing diesel emissions from older diesel engines. Legacy diesel engines emit large amounts of NO_x and PM_{2.5}, which contribute to serious public health problems, including asthma, lung disease, and various other cardiac and respiratory diseases. Through the [2024 Diesel Emissions Reduction Act Tribal](#) and [Territory Grants Notice of Funding Opportunity](#), EPA anticipates awarding approximately \$9 million in total DERA funding to eligible applicants, subject to the availability of funds.

“EPA is pleased to support the air quality goals of Tribes and territories as they work to improve public health,” **said EPA Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation Joseph Goffman**. “Replacing older, more polluting diesel vehicles and equipment with cleaner new alternatives will reduce harmful diesel exhaust in nearby communities while supporting local economies.”

A total of \$8 million will be made available to federally recognized Tribal governments, intertribal consortia, and Alaska Native Villages, and \$1 million will be made available to territories, including government agencies of the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Matching funds are not required for eligibility to the program. These grants are specifically tailored to expand access to diesel emission reduction projects to those Tribes and territories with more limited resources. The DERA program has worked with Tribes to tailor the DERA Tribal competition to meet their specific needs since 2014 and opened the program to territories (formerly known as insular areas) in 2021. This allows for Tribes and territories to pursue more robust and impactful projects.

Nearly 8 million legacy diesel engines are in use in the United States and emissions from these engines are a significant source of health problems. The DERA program prioritizes projects in areas that face challenging air quality issues, especially those projects that benefit underserved communities or populations that have faced or are facing environmental health or environmental justice disparities.

Application packages must be submitted electronically to EPA through Grants.gov by Friday, December 6, at 11:59 p.m. EST to be considered for funding. Although funding for both Tribes and territories is being announced under this single Notice of Funding Opportunity, the applications for each group will be reviewed separately.

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EPA Announces \$9M in Grants Available for Tribes and Eligible US Territories to Replace Diesel Equipment and Reduce Harmful Emissions (continued)

EPA will host several information sessions regarding this funding opportunity. Webinar links and dial-in information for the information sessions can be found on the [Tribal and Territory Grants: Diesel Emissions Reduction Act webpage](#).

More than 73,700 engines, vehicles, or other pieces of equipment were replaced or retrofitted to run cleaner with DERA funds during fiscal years 2008 to 2018, according to the [DERA Fifth Report to Congress](#).

For more information and to access the Notice of Funding Opportunity, visit the [Tribal and Territory Grants: Diesel Emissions Reduction Act](#) webpage. For general information on the DERA Program, visit the [DERA Program webpage](#).

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

Source: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency