



CENTER FOR PUBLIC ENVIRONMENTAL OVERSIGHT

A project of the Pacific Studies Center

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## **Grassroots Letter on Defense Environmental Appointments**

December 17, 2008

To the Obama Transition Team:

We are present and former residents of communities impacted by Department of Defense and military contractor Environmental and Sustainability activities; present and former Defense employees and members of the armed services; and representatives of organizations that work with such constituencies. The U.S. military has a significant impact upon our health, property, and communities. In fact, decisions made by Defense environmental officials have as much impact on our communities as decisions at U.S. EPA and other federal agencies.

We don't expect Defense environmental officials always to agree with us, but during the administrations of George H.W. Bush and William J. Clinton, the military improved its relationships with our communities. During the last eight years, those relationships deteriorated with the appointment of leaders who believe short-term Department concerns take precedence over all other requirements. We recognize that some appointees and a large number of uniformed personnel and civilian employees are still trying to do the right thing, but it is essential to have Defense environmental appointees who appreciate the public interest as a whole and engender confidence among the public as well as state, local, and tribal governments.

When Vice-President Cheney was Defense Secretary, he stated that the Department should not just comply with environmental requirements, but it should be a leader. Today, this is even more important as the nation tackles the challenges of climate change, energy dependence, and grid vulnerability. With its vast landholdings, infrastructure, and land, sea, and air vehicle fleets, the Defense Department should be in the forefront in the drive for economic and environmental sustainability.

We urge, therefore, that the Defense Department create a high-level position within the Office of the Secretary of Defense—at the Undersecretary level—with responsibility for energy, environment, and other sustainability policies.

We further urge President Obama to appoint Defense environmental leaders who have demonstrated a clear commitment to protecting public health and the environment and building a sustainable future. Moreover, we ask that appointees meet the three following criteria:

1. They should recognize that the military is not above the law. The Defense Department is subject to environmental regulation by U.S. EPA, states, tribal, and local governments like any other entity.
2. The military should not interfere in the establishment of environmental standards. It should have the same access to the standard-setting process as the public, academia, and private polluters. Health standards should be based upon science, not the interests of those responsible for complying with them.
3. Existing public involvement strategies should be strengthened. Limits on the operations of Restoration Advisory Boards should be lifted, and similar bodies should be established to oversee installation and range sustainability activities. Furthermore, the Department should establish avenues, such as multi-stakeholder dialogues or conferences, to encourage public input at the national policy level.

We believe that elevating sustainability and making careful environmental appointments at the Defense Department will serve the men and women of the armed services, their families, host communities, national security, the natural environment, and the future of the planet.

Sincerely\*,

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\*Many affiliations, such as RAB participation, are for identification purposes only.