



# Society of Environmental Journalists

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Administrator McCarthy:

We at the Society of Environmental Journalists must register our strenuous objection to the way the EPA rolled out its Clean Power rule this week, with a truncated, anonymous "background" tele-briefing for news media representatives. Given the complexity and significance of this regulation – and its importance to the public – it seems incongruous and myopic for the agency to give such short shrift to the role journalists could play in informing the public about it.

EPA invited members of the news media Monday morning to join a "background conference call with reporters" about the agency's proposed rule. When journalists questioned why it was "background" and not "on the record," we were informed it was "on the record," but any comments made were to be attributed to an unnamed "senior EPA official." That's not what "on the record" means, by any journalistic standard.

As the conference call began at noon EDT, there were several EPA officials speaking, not just one, and most were not identified. When journalists got called on to ask questions, Dina Cappiello of the Associated Press and at least one other journalist urged that all remarks be on the record and the speakers named. At least two other journalists communicated similar concerns to your media relations staff via email prior to the call.

It's important for you to understand why attribution matters. Many reporters and news organizations, especially those outside the Washington Beltway, hew to the principle that they will only publish or air information provided by a named source. It's a question of credibility – ours and yours.

Your predecessor began by holding no-name background briefings on everything from regulations to the President's budget proposal for EPA, but the agency relented after SEJ and possibly others complained. Now the practice has returned, on arguably the most momentous action of this agency in this administration.

SEJ urges you to commit to a much higher level of transparency and to allow your staff to speak on the record and by name, especially at briefings arranged by the agency. We journalists are personally accountable for

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to advance public understanding of environmental issues*

what we report about EPA's actions. Why aren't your staff members just as accountable for what they tell us? End this insidious practice, which only reinforces public cynicism about a nameless, faceless, feckless federal bureaucracy.

Finally, we note that you held an "ask me anything" session on Reddit Monday, but your only availability to the press on that day was via a scripted speech Webcast from EPA, with no one there to ask you questions. We urge you to hold regular "ask me anything" availabilities with the news media, especially around such important decisions. And we specifically invite you to come take questions at SEJ's annual conference in New Orleans in September 3-7, just as you did at SEJ's 2009 annual conference in Madison, Wisconsin, when you were AA for air.

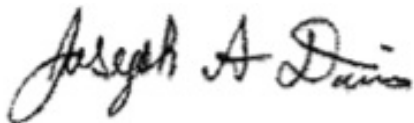
In closing, we stand ready to meet with you or your staff to discuss these and other issues that journalists have with getting interviews and timely information from EPA. The agency's media policies and practices need to change to better serve the public and you.

We respectfully request a written response to our concerns and to our invitation to SEJ's New Orleans conference.

Sincerely,



Beth Parke  
Executive Director  
Society of Environmental Journalists



Joseph A. Davis, PhD  
Director, Editor, SEJ FOI WatchDog