



# Society of Environmental Journalists

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January 22, 2018

Ms. Liz Bowman  
Associate Administrator, Office of Public Affairs  
USEPA Headquarters, William Jefferson Clinton Building  
1200 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Mail Code: 6101A  
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Ms. Bowman:

We write to you on behalf of the members of the Society of Environmental Journalists and all working journalists to urge the Environmental Protection Agency to take affirmative steps toward greater transparency and accountability to the public by making its personnel, actions and information more accessible to the news media.

SEJ is the largest and oldest organization of journalists who cover topics related to the environment. SEJ members work in a variety of media including television, radio, print, and online for media in 50 states and 27 other countries.

Journalists serve an important role in our democracy, informing the public about the science, policy, politics and economics of the complicated issues the nation faces— issues from air pollution to pesticides to Superfund and combined sewer systems.

Our nation's founders knew the importance of a press that is free to report on the activities of our government and elected officials. "Our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost," Thomas Jefferson wrote in a 1786 letter. Through the years, support for freedom of the press has been bipartisan. Ronald Reagan once said, "There is no more essential ingredient than a free, strong and independent press to our continued success in what the founding fathers called our 'noble experiment' in self-government." And we note that "providing greater transparency" is one of the goals of the new strategic plan drawn up to guide EPA's actions over the next several years.

News media are still the principal channel through which most Americans get their information about the environment. Yet without access to information from agencies like the EPA, journalists cannot serve their constitutional role as informers of the public.

Journalists need access to EPA data, documents, and agency officials and scientists to let the public know about the many important environmental and public health issues facing our nation. Without transparency to the media, there can be no transparency to the public.

We would like to have a conversation with you about how we can improve our interactions, to ensure that self-government as outlined by the Constitution survives and flourishes, and that a free press remains a cornerstone of our nation and our liberty. Toward that end, we urge EPA leadership to embrace the following principles, and to make them standard operating procedures throughout the agency:

- 1) Engage with reporters, and maintain professionalism at all times. Commit to responding to inquiries in a meaningful and timely manner, arranging interviews with subject matter experts whenever feasible and in any event responding by the reporter's deadline.
- 2) Distribute all press releases, media advisories, and announcements broadly, to all who request them, and not just to a select audience.
- 3) Hold open press briefings on significant policy rollouts and regulatory actions. Invite all regular beat reporters to in-person briefings held at EPA headquarters; provide web conferencing and teleconference access for all interested reporters outside the Washington area when the agency action or policy has regional or nationwide scope.
- 4) Reinstate the practice of publishing and distributing a weekly list of the EPA administrator's scheduled public appearances, so reporters may plan coverage of those that seem newsworthy.
- 5) Resume the practice of publishing an up-to-date calendar of all the EPA administrator's meetings – not just public events — with staff, stakeholders, elected officials, and other individuals and groups from outside the Agency. Currently, the only calendar available online is the administrator's, and it's about two weeks behind.

Doubtless, you and your administration have not liked everything broadcast or published so far about the agency's activities. If you make information and staff more available to the press as we suggest, you still aren't likely to be happy with everything you read, see and hear. Such is the nature of government — there are always critics. But only through greater transparency and through engaging with journalists can you effectively make your case, and the public get a better understanding of what you are doing and why.

We hope you'll take this letter in the spirit in which it was written, and that it can foster a dialogue about how to enhance coverage of the nation's environmental protectors.

We are requesting that your office arrange a meeting or phone conference to discuss these matters. Please contact Beth Parke at [bpanke@sej.org](mailto:bpanke@sej.org), (202) 558-2050 or Christine Bruggers at [cbruggs@sej.org](mailto:cbruggs@sej.org), (202) 558-2022. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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