U.S. SENATOR DIANNE FEINSTEIN
CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY - RANKING MEMBER
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COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
COMMITTEE ON RULES AND ADMINISTRATION

United States Senate

March 8, 2021

Ms. Jane Nishida
Acting Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency

Dear Acting Administrator Nishida:

I write regarding DDT contamination off the coast of California and ask that you prioritize urgent and meaningful action to remediate this serious threat to human and environmental health.

From 1947 to 1983, Montrose Chemical Corporation, the nation's largest manufacturer of DDT, was located in Torrance, California. Despite the 1972 ban on DDT, production continued for about the next decade and it was common practice to dispose of industrial waste off the California coast. In 1989, EPA added the Montrose Chemical site to the Superfund National Priorities List, and investigation of these coastal waters revealed that DDT and PCB-laced contaminated sewage dumped in the ocean had created a serious public health risk.

A settlement between federal and state agencies and several chemical companies was reached to help fund the cleanup of DDT contamination of the off-shore site known as the Palos Verdes shelf. However, after two decades of studies and monitoring, the Palos Verdes Shelf clean-up is still not complete. I know this is a complex undertaking, however I am dismayed at the slow progress despite tens of millions of dollars spent on the cleanup over the last two decades.

Now, scientists at UC Santa Barbara have discovered what they estimate to be hundreds of thousands of industrial waste barrels in varying states of decay on the ocean floor near Catalina Island, about 22 miles off the California coast. The barrels contain industrial waste laced with toxic chemicals, including DDT and PCBs, and some appear to be leaking.

Alarmingly, some areas off Catalina Island have recorded concentrations of DDT at rates 40 times higher than the highest level of contamination at Palos Verdes. It is scientifically established that DDT, PCB, and other industrial waste are serious threats to wildlife and human health. DDT pollution has been linked to increased cancer rates among California sea lions and is a known cancer risk to humans.

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I ask that EPA prioritize both of these issues, and I look forward to working with you on these and other California priorities. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions or if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

DF/as

cc:
Radhika Fox, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator, EPA Office of Water
Deborah Jordan, Acting Regional Administrator, EPA Region 9