JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER IV
WEST VIRGINIA

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4802

January 13, 2014

Gina McCarthy
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dr. Tom Frieden
Director
Centers for Disease Control
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30333

Director Frieden & Administrator McCarthy,

I have dedicated my fifty year career in public service to the health of the people and the businesses in my state. A diverse and growing state economy, good jobs and healthy families are at the heart of a thriving state. Our state is a special place where neighbors help neighbors and our work ethic and resilience are second to none, even as crisis this week has tested our mettle. And when crisis arises, those of us in the federal government should always stand ready to help our families and businesses.

The recent chemical leak at the Freedom Industries plant near Charleston, West Virginia has left over 300,000 West Virginians without access to safe, clean water. Despite progress in responding to the spill, the people of West Virginia are still struggling to open schools, get businesses back up and running, and frankly take care of household needs like laundry, dishes, and cleaning.

Last Thursday 7,500 gallons of crude 4-methylcyclohexane methanol (MCHM) leaked from a failed storage tank at Freedom Industries, located only one and a half miles upstream from West Virginia American Water's intake on the Elk River. The chemical, which is toxic for human consumption, was detected at high levels in tap water. The President has declared a state of emergency for the nine impacted West Virginia counties and an emergency "do not use" order has been in effect for five days since the spill. Multiple federal, state, and local agencies are on the ground serving the citizens of West Virginia: distributing emergency supplies, testing and purifying the water table, and investigating what caused the spill to occur.

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The long term health effects resulting from exposure are unclear. I have heard from many of my constituents that they are concerned and have questions regarding public health for themselves, their children, their pets and livestock. They are worried about both the immediate impact, but also the long-term effects of this chemical in our water supply, in the water treatment facility supplied by the Elk River, and in the Kanawha and Ohio Rivers that feed other water treatment facilities. Because remediation and containment of the leak site are incomplete, I have also heard from residents who fear ongoing leaching from contaminated soil, river banks and the holding tanks which could result in further contamination the water supply at a time when the water treatment facility may have compromised filters and taxed processing systems.

At the time of the spill, neither science nor industry had existing protocols for either testing or safe levels of exposure to this chemical. A great deal of work has been done in recent days to determine protocols to protect public safety and ensure confidence.

I understand that both the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have worked with our state and local efforts to respond to this spill. I would ask that your agencies continue to do everything possible to help our West Virginia families and businesses get back on their feet and ensure that their needs are being met after this very difficult event.

I request that the CDC and EPA work together to study long-term public health risks associated with a MCHM spill of this magnitude. Such a study will not only help the people of West Virginia but also inform any future incidents involving this compound. I am making this request of two separate agencies with the goal that no stone will go unturned, and no jurisdictional confusion will leave any key question unanswered. Please respond to me with an explanation of how this study will be done, including which agency will undergo which portion of the inquiry and how the two agencies will coordinate their efforts.

In the coming weeks and months, the assistance of both the Environmental Protection Agency and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention will be critical in long-term well being of the state of West Virginia and its citizens.

It is at times like these that I am particularly grateful for the expertise available through you agencies. Thank you in advance for your careful and prompt attention to this health concern.

Sincerely,

John D. Rockefeller IV

CC: Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
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Atlanta, GA 3034