

Blowing the Whistle on EPA's Widespread Abuse

June 1, 1998

Editor's note: The following letter to the editor appeared in the June 10 issue of The Washington Times, and is reprinted here with permission.

Your coverage of Bonner Cohen's National Wilderness Institute report, "The People versus Carol Browner," alerts the public to egregious misconduct at the Environmental Protection Agency ("Junked scientists," Editorials, May 12; "EPA microbiologist says agency is playing politics," May 13).

Problems such as those publicized by EPA research microbiologist David Lewis are pervasive. Indeed, we find the situation so reprehensible that we submit this letter, risking our careers rather than choosing to remain silent.

Many of us work in the EPA's regional offices where environmental rules and regulations are enforced. There, as elsewhere within the EPA, employees are harassed, even fired, for protesting illegal or irresponsible behavior by managers who jeopardize the proper enforcement of the law under Superfund, the Clean Air Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and other environmental statutes. Most employees who suffer retaliation lack the determination, legal knowledge, and resources to defend themselves.

At the EPA, retaliation against whistleblowers occurs at every management level. At times, it involves the highest levels of administration—including the offices of regional administrators and the office of Administrator Carol Browner. Because the retaliation is supported at the highest levels, EPA's Office of Inspector General, Office of General Counsel, and the Office of the Administrator will engage in retaliation either singularly or collectively.

Even if the Department of Labor, the Merit Systems Protection Board, or EPA's Office of Inspector General investigate and substantiate whistleblowers' claims, two results will inevitably follow. Whistleblowers will be fired or their careers dead-ended; and individuals who carry out the activities reported by whistleblowers, or who retaliate against whistleblowers, will be promoted to keep them from incriminating administrators who approve of their actions.

We are but a few of the EPA scientists, managers, and affiliated persons protesting fraud or waste in our agency involving hundreds of millions of dollars, and alerting the public that EPA regulations and enforcement actions based on poor science stand to harm rather than protect public health and the environment.

At our request, Dr. Lewis has published some of our stories on his personal home page on the Internet at <http://members.aol.com/LewisDaveL>. We applaud Rep. David McIntosh's commitment to hold public hearings and hope that the Senate leadership will become vigorously engaged as well. Too many voices of those who would put the public interest above their own have been silenced inside the EPA.

With EPA: *William Davis, research ecologist, Gulfbreeze, Fla.; Larry Fisher, staff accountant, Research Triangle Park, N.C.; Arnie Grigsby, environmental protection specialist, Denver, Colo.; Cate Jenkins, environmental scientist, Washington; Mary Johnson, technical information manager, Narragansett, R.I.; Thomas McCurdy, physical scientist, Research Triangle Park, N.C.; William Newby, contracts specialist, Research Triangle Park, N.C.; Brian Rimar, environmental scientist, Denver, Colo.; Valeta McDaniel, chemist, Athens, Ga.; Hugh Wise, environmental scientist, Washington.* Affiliated persons: *Susan Channell (grantee), senior environmental employment program, Athens, Ga.; Thelma Dickinson (contractor), enforcement specialist, Denver, Colo.; David Gattie (grantee), environmental engineer, Athens, Ga.*