

July 28, 2004

To Whom It May Concern:

I understand that in the name of national security a directive is being proposed that will undermine the public's Right To Know about decisions that affect their health and environment. I strongly object to exempting government agencies from following federal environmental regulations and excluding the American people from participating in the public comment process regarding decisions that can have long-term health and environmental consequences.

Please refer to the article below for more details.

Sincerely,

Patricia Miller, REHS
Concerned American Citizen

A new directive proposed by the Bush administration would grant broad environmental exemptions to numerous government agencies under the guise of national security. It would also exclude the American public from decisions that can have long-term health and environmental consequences.

Under directives for carrying out the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), agencies such as the Coast Guard, Border Patrol, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and many others would be given "categorical exemptions" from following federal environmental regulations if they invoke reasons of national security. Such exclusions would enable agencies to conduct activities in secret that could have serious implications for public safety - such as using or storing hazardous chemicals in close proximity to residential areas and schools without letting citizens know about their risk of exposure.

The directive would also allow the degradation of public resources -- such as the building of new roads through national forests for use by the Border Patrol -- with no input from the public whatsoever. While these agencies would still have to conduct environmental reviews before taking action, those reviews would not be subject to public scrutiny or public comment. [1]

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"This rule is just one example of how the Bush administration uses 9/11 and the threat of terrorism generally to instill fear and basically prevent the public from learning what it has a right to know," says Brian Segee, associate counsel for Defenders of Wildlife.

"There are legitimate reasons to keep some information secret," he said. "But these should be narrowly defined. Does the fact that Border Patrol is blazing a road through a national forest need to be kept secret? We don't think so."

Segee submitted a nine-page letter to the Department of Homeland Security criticizing the proposed directive on behalf of Defenders of Wildlife, the Ocean Conservancy and the National Audubon Society. The Natural Resources Defense Council also submitted detailed comments, asking that certain exclusions - such as those related to the disposal of hazardous wastes - be deleted from the document. [2]

The period for submitting comments to the Department of Homeland Security has been extended until August 16.

<http://ga3.org/bushgreenwatch/join.html?r=ppqu7UY1halKE>

SOURCES:

[1] Department of Homeland Security website,
<http://ga3.org/ct/e7qu7UY1FjG0/>.

[2] NRDC letter, Jul. 14, 2004, Defenders of Wildlife letter,
Jul. 14, 2004.