



# Durbin, Senators To Epa: Protect Communities In Region Five

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL), along with U.S. Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Gary Peters (D-MI), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Tina Smith (D-MN), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), today urged the new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 5 Administrator, Kurt Thiede, to prioritize protecting public health and safety and supporting the hard-working career professionals within Region 5 – which includes Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. In a letter to Thiede, the Senators cited a troubling pattern of reduction of enforcement actions, inspections, and staff in the past three years.

“Without these essential components, the health and safety of our constituents is compromised—especially for the most vulnerable populations who are disproportionately affected by pollution,” the Senators wrote.

The Senators also cited multiple issues which require U.S. EPA Region 5’s attention, including: reducing ethylene oxide pollution; soil clean-up for manganese and lead, and increasing lead emissions monitoring; cleaning up Superfund sites and addressing PFAS contamination across the Great Lakes Basin; working to reduce harmful algal blooms and the discharge of toxic chemicals into the Great Lakes; and ensuring that proper enforcement actions are taken for violations and reporting issues.

The full text of the letter can be found [here](#) and below:

February 6, 2020

Dear Mr. Thiede:

We write to you to request that in your new role as Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 5 Administrator, you work to change some of the troubling new norms that have developed, including decreases in staffing and enforcement, and that you

prioritize protecting human health and safety and supporting the hard-working career professionals within your regional jurisdiction.

Of particular note, we are concerned about the marked declines in enforcement—a critical mechanism to ensure environmental laws and regulations are being followed—which may fail to hold accountable polluters that harm the public health and the environment. We are specifically concerned by the reduction of enforcement actions, inspections, and staff in the past three years, and we strongly urge you to make it a priority to address these concerns. Without these essential components, the health and safety of our constituents is compromised—especially for the most vulnerable populations who are disproportionately affected by pollution.

We also would like to bring your attention to a few ongoing issues, including issues we have previously requested that Region 5 address. Region 5 should work to take all necessary steps in protecting communities in Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Minnesota, Indiana, and its 35 tribes from harmful pollution, which includes, but is not limited to, reducing ethylene oxide pollution; exercising EPA's discretion to use more protective thresholds for soil clean-up for manganese and lead and increasing lead emissions monitoring; cleaning up Superfund sites and addressing PFAS contamination across the Great Lakes Basin; working to reduce harmful algal blooms and the discharge of toxic chemicals into the Great Lakes; and ensuring that proper enforcement actions are taken for violations and reporting issues.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests. We look forward to working with you to ensure families in Region 5 live in communities that are safe, clean, and protected by the U.S. EPA.

Sincerely,