

# Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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## Remaking the EPA

**Dear EcoGirl:** The EPA too often seems to put corporate interests over its mission to protect the environment. Will President Obama's EPA really be any better? *Signed, Skeptical*

**Dear Skeptical:** Thank you for your question. The short answer is — yes, I think that real improvement is possible, if we help.

The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) has indeed been seriously compromised by the Bush administration. Thus, many environmental observers were delighted when candidate Barack Obama said that, in his EPA, “the principle of scientific integrity will be an absolute, and I will never sanction any attempt to subvert the work of scientists.” President Obama's choice for EPA head, Lisa Jackson, affirmed this commitment in her introductory letter to staff, pledging to “uphold the values of scientific integrity, rule of law, and transparency every day.”

Those heartened by this change in direction include the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), which for years has been drawing attention to the Bush administration's “pattern of suppression, manipulation, and distortion of federal science” in order to advance predetermined policy objectives. This, says the UCS, has significantly hindered policymakers in making informed decisions, decreased agency effectiveness, threatened our ability to respond to our nation's challenges, risked “demoralizing the federal scientific workforce,” and made “our government less accountable to the citizens it is supposed to serve.”

Among the countless decisions compromised was the EPA's shocking choice not to set federal limits on toxic perchlorate levels in drinking water. It did this over the objections of its own scientists, removing from its report key scientific evidence of the reasons for concern. (I discuss this topic more in “Toxics & The Thyroid” at [www.healthyworld.org/thyroid.html](http://www.healthyworld.org/thyroid.html).)

So it's a relief to hear the EPA's Jackson now call science the “backbone” of

the agency's programs, and speak her commitment to view data objectively and disclose the information supporting their conclusions. She outlined her five priority goals: reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving air quality, managing chemical risks, cleaning up hazardous waste sites, and protecting America's water. She added, “These challenges are indeed immense in scale and urgency. But, as President Obama said [on Inauguration Day], they will be met.” (More about her staff letter is at [www.ombwatch.org/node/9639](http://www.ombwatch.org/node/9639).)

However, for that promise to be fulfilled, we citizens need to insist on its implementation, because ahead surely lie the pitfalls of vested financial interests, competing budget priorities, and bureaucratic inertia. We need to empower their ability to act.

Thankfully, I see positive signs. For instance, I discovered that Jackson in her previous job (head of New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection) supported a five parts per billion perchlorate standard, which is within the National Academy of Science's recommendations.

### What You Can Do

By helping restore the EPA's vital functions, we can improve our prospects on so many environmental and health issues. Therefore, I encourage you to learn more about the proposed improvements, then speak for the ones you value, either through the groups taking action or directly to President Obama at ([www.whitehouse.gov/contact](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact)). Also support the non-profits that inform us and coalesce our voices.

Here are some places to start.

- **Union of Concerned Scientists.** For UCS's detailed recommendations (based on interviews with EPA scientists), and ways to join their efforts, see ([www.ucsusa.org/scientific\\_integrity](http://www.ucsusa.org/scientific_integrity)).

- **Pesticide Action Network (PAN).** This international group, which works for global reduction of pesticide use, has submitted recommendations en-

dorsed by nearly 100 organizations and thousands of individuals. Its top priorities include scientific integrity, transparency, accountability, public and environmental health, and a green and fair economy. View it and sign on at ([www.panna.org/agenda-for-change](http://www.panna.org/agenda-for-change)).

- **The Louisville Charter for Safer Chemicals.** Signed by 70 groups, including PAN, this community-created declaration calls for government leadership in key areas of chemical policy, including restoring scientific integrity in chemical regulation, adopting the precautionary principle to ensure product safety before going to market, and increasing transparency in decision-making. ([www.louisvillecharter.org](http://www.louisvillecharter.org))

As President Obama said election night, this moment “is not the change we seek; it is only the chance for us to make that change.” We need to take action for the possibilities to become real. But, because these vital intentions are being spoken at government's highest levels, positive results become more possible and our efforts more effective. What a wonderful time to allow ourselves a glimmer of hope, then join with others in creating a better world. We certainly wouldn't want to waste this opportunity, then wonder, “What if...?”

*Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. View past columns at <www.AskEcoGirl.info>. Also contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical. “EcoGirl: Encouraging the eco-hero in everyone.”*

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