

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Standing Up for the EPA

Dear EcoGirl: Some presidential candidates have said that, if elected, they'd abolish the EPA. Do you think that's a good idea? *Signed, Concerned Voter*

Dear Concerned Voter: Thank you for your question. Well, generally I don't comment on candidates during an election, because I want my eco-information to serve folks with a wide range of beliefs. However, I will comment on the environmental aspect of your question, because I want to encourage our support of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as a unique and crucial ally for protecting our health and well-being.

My quick answer is that the arguments for eliminating the EPA just don't hold water. Despite attractive cover stories, this is just another coordinated attack on environmental regulations that would allow polluters to continue their harmful activities.

It's as if outlaws terrorizing our town sponsored an ad campaign claiming that the real solution to crime was eliminating the position of sheriff and the relevant laws. Smart folks would see that this wasn't a logical objective argument to serve the community.

However, today's eco-attacks come cloaked in superficially appealing arguments that push emotional hot buttons such as "jobs" and "freedom." So let's improve the discussion by looking below the surface.

Key Points to Remember

1) The EPA has significantly improved our health, survival, and financial well-being. As just one example, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) says that, between 1970 and 1990, the Clean Air Act prevented 205,000 premature deaths, 21,000 cases of heart disease, and 843,000 asthma attacks. Between 1992 and 2002, it saved Americans

between \$121 to \$193 billion, while costing just \$23 to \$27 billion, thus offering a stunning financial return of 500 to 700%.

2) We need the EPA to continue working on today's eco-crises. While the agency isn't perfect, no other entity can play its role of setting and enforcing national standards for air and water quality, pesticide use, fuel economy, wilderness and endangered species protection, nuclear practices, waste management, water and energy efficiency, and more.

3) A large majority of Americans support the EPA's protection efforts, according to a recent bipartisan survey by the American Lung Association, and even want them increased.

4) The EPA's centralized coordination is more efficient and effective than fragmented rules. It's a key reason the agency was created.

5) Without the EPA, our environment, health, and quality of life would significantly decline. When the EPA was formed, the public was outraged over rivers catching fire, pesticides killing birds, and stunning smog levels. Do we really want to go back there?

Clarifying Misinformation

Contrary to proponent assertions:

1) The EPA does not inherently compromise freedom. But polluters do, when their toxics trespass into our bodies and take away our right not to be poisoned. Thus, the EPA is protecting our freedom by setting limits on this harm. (See www.commondreams.org/view/2011/12/20-5.)

2) The U.S. is not over-regulated. Studies have demonstrated businesses' ease with our regulations. Plus we're more attractive because of the quality of life our regulations produce. (See www.huffingtonpost.com/steven-strauss/actually-despite-gop-clai_b_1118792.html.)

3) Eco-regulations do not kill jobs. Studies show that they're job neutral.

4) The proposed option of individual lawsuits can't replace the EPA's functions. It would require people and courts to spend enormous time and money replicating the EPA's research, standard setting, and enforcement. Businesses would have to navigate a patchwork of conflicting cases. Plus many issues would be unaddressed, such as cumulative harm from multiple sources. This would all waste everyone's resources and produce significantly worse results.

True Solutions

1) Let's stand in support of the EPA, and strengthen it. For ideas, see my column at www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl2h.html

2) Let's reclaim government as us not them. We created it to act for our shared interests and resolve conflicts fairly. Let's improve it, not start from scratch.

3) Let's get corporate money out of politics. It's overwhelming voters' voices and fairness. See www.storyofstuff.org/movies-all/story-of-citizens-united-v-fec.

For more on this topic, see www.patriciadines.info/EcoGirl5e.html.

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. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.

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