



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

April 17, 2015

OFFICE OF THE  
ADMINISTRATOR

Sheela Sathyanarayana, M.D., M.P.H.  
Chair  
Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee  
University of Washington Department of Pediatrics  
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Dear Dr. Sathyanarayana:

I would like to convey U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Gina McCarthy's gratitude for the Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee letter of August 28, 2014, responding to her request for a few great ideas for the agency to consider. We both appreciate the time and energy that the committee devoted to developing this list of recommendations. The Administrator asked that I provide you with an update on the Office of Children's Health's activities, many of which relate to or help address the recommendations outlined in your letter.

One of your primary recommendations was to increase the EPA's capacity to effectively address children's health. I am pleased to say Dr. Ruth Etzel in January joined the EPA team as the director of the Office of Children's Health Protection and also as the senior advisor to the Administrator on children's health.

As you may know, Dr. Etzel earned her doctor of medicine degree from the University Of Wisconsin School Of Medicine and completed residencies in pediatrics and preventive medicine in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She received her doctorate in epidemiology from the University Of North Carolina School Of Public Health and was selected for the prestigious Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars Program. During her professional career, Dr. Etzel has made countless contributions to protect children's environmental health as a Commissioned Corps officer in the U.S. Public Health Service and through her leadership roles at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of Agriculture, the Indian Health Service and the World Health Organization. She is an accomplished author in the field and received numerous awards for her work. I have attached her biography for your review so that you can read about her other notable accomplishments.

Dr. Etzel has repeatedly demonstrated that she is a courageous leader in bringing children's health risks to public attention and working collaboratively toward solutions. She has already proven to be a brilliant hire, and we are convinced that with her help we are well-poised to address children's health with more diligence than ever. Specifically, in her first few months on the job, she shepherded our Office of Children's Health colleagues through their annual leadership retreat where they explored ways to better protect children's health through review, guidance and partnership with other parts of the agency and partners.

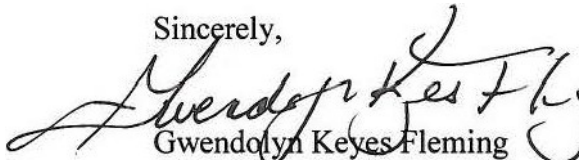
The Office of Children's Health Protection budget and staff levels will remain constant this year as will the EPA's commitment to the Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units. The Administrator has great pride and confidence in our collaboration with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Response on pediatric units. Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units have become a key resource that the EPA recommends to communities nationwide. Though funding has not increased for most EPA programs, we are finding ways to increase the profile of children's health issues in the agency and to assist more EPA employees in their efforts to work within their programmatic responsibilities to address children's health concerns. For example, we have recently completed an agencywide Strategy for Children's Environmental Health Protection – the first of its kind – that identifies children's health actions within the structure of the agency's goals and cross-agency strategies. The strategy will help strengthen the ways in which we incorporate children's health into all agency actions and improve our ability to monitor the agency's progress toward meaningful improvements in children's health. We also held an agencywide Summit on Children's Environmental Health last October to promote the importance of children's health in all EPA programs, highlight success stories and best practices and facilitate senior management discussions on relevant children's health topics.

Regarding your recommendation to "require OCHP review, guidance, and concurrence with the application of safety factors protective of prenatal, infant and child populations in all Agency rules and regulations, with a specific focus on pesticide registration/re-registration eligibility decision documents and other pesticide risk assessments," OCHP is continuing active engagement on the highest-priority rules and regulations related to children's health. In addition, OCHP has recently established a new memorandum of understanding with the EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs. As stated in the MOU, OCHP will provide review of new policies that apply to pesticide risk assessments and will review the individual assessments developed for registration review and tolerance decisions with greatest risk to children's health, including review of the Food Quality Protection Act safety factors. This approach is responsive to the Government Accountability Office's recommendation that you cite in your letter, and we will continue to evaluate this effort to see where additional efforts to promote children's health can be made.

Lastly, I understand that addressing the problems of clinician billing and electronic health records would be a great benefit to medical and nursing professionals in clinical settings who would like to better address environmental exposures. The EPA is not the ultimate decision maker on those issues, but I encourage you to contact the Department of Health and Human Services so it can address this important recommendation through its channels. We are working in collaboration with several other members of the federal government to better safeguard children's health. Under the Task Force's Coordinated Federal Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Asthma Disparities, the EPA and other federal agencies are working together to promote coverage of home-based asthma care and in-home interventions, including recent Department of Housing and Urban Development and EPA summits on pediatric home interventions and reimbursement opportunities. We welcome the opportunity to support HHS should it begin to explore your suggestion.

The Administrator is grateful for your insights, and we look forward to continuing to work with you on these issues.

Sincerely,



Gwendolyn Keyes Fleming  
Chief of Staff

Enclosure

## Biography of Ruth Etzel

Ruth A. Etzel, M.D., Ph.D. is Director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Children's Health Protection and a senior advisor to the Administrator on children's health. Previously, Dr. Etzel was a Professor of Epidemiology at the Zilber School of Public Health at the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee. She received her M.D. from the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and completed residencies in Pediatrics and Preventive Medicine in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Dr. Etzel was selected for the prestigious Robert Wood Johnson Clinical Scholars Program, and during her fellowship discovered that protection from environmental contaminants was integral to keeping children and their families healthy. She received her Ph.D. in Epidemiology from the University of North Carolina School of Public Health. She was a pioneer in studying the health effects of exposure to secondhand smoke among infants; her work led to nationwide efforts to reduce indoor exposures to tobacco, including the ban on smoking in U.S. airliners.

Dr. Etzel served in numerous public-sector leadership positions including: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Founding Chief of the Air Pollution and Respiratory Health Branch), Department of Agriculture (Director of the Division of Epidemiology and Risk Assessment) and Indian Health Service (Research Director at the Alaska Native Medical Center). She is a courageous leader in bringing health risks to children to public attention and working collaboratively towards solutions. In 1989, after a small child developed acrodynia (mercury poisoning) from breathing mercury vapor from paint containing mercury that had been applied to the walls inside his house, she made a compelling case to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for the removal of mercury from interior latex paints. In response, the EPA quickly reached an agreement with U.S. paint companies to stop the addition of mercury compounds to interior latex paints.

Dr. Etzel served as the Senior Officer for Environmental Health Research at the World Health Organization from 2009 to 2012. She is the founding editor of the influential book *Pediatric Environmental Health* (a 3rd edition was published in 2012). This book has helped to train thousands of doctors who care for children about how to recognize, diagnose, treat and prevent illness among children from hazards in the environment. She co-edited the *Textbook of Children's Environmental Health*, published in 2014. In addition to being board-certified in Pediatrics, Dr. Etzel is also board-certified in Preventive Medicine and served for 9 years on the American Board of Preventive Medicine. She was a member of the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute's First Expert Panel on the Management of Asthma. Dr. Etzel has received numerous awards, including the 2007 Children's Environmental Health Champion Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Distinguished Service Award from the U.S. Public Health Service, and the Arthur S. Flemming Award.