



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

September 17, 2002

OFFICE OF
ENFORCEMENT AND
COMPLIANCE ASSURANCE

SPEECH

SUBJECT: EPA Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration

FROM: John Peter Suarez

TO: EPA HQ Washington, DC

BUENOS DIAS! IT IS AN HONOR FOR ME TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS
CELEBRATION FOR OUR HISPANIC AMERICANS!!

LET ME START OUT BY SAYING HOW HAPPY I AM TO BE HERE
TODAY AS THE NEWLY CONFIRMED ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR
FOR OECA. I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING CLOSELY WITH ALL OF
YOU IN HEADQUARTERS AS WELL AS WITH THE REGIONS AS I
CARRY OUT MY MISSION OF ENFORCEMENT AND COMPLIANCE
ASSURANCE TO SECURE A SAFER AND HEALTHIER ENVIRONMENT.

I WANT TO THANK EACH OF YOU HERE TODAY, EMPLOYEES
AND VISITORS ALIKE, FOR TAKING TIME OUT OF YOUR BUSY
SCHEDULES TO JOIN EPA IN CELEBRATING HISPANIC HERITAGE

MONTH. AS THIS YEARS THEME IMPLIES THERE IS STRENGTH IN UNITY, FAITH AND.. “YES”... DIVERSITY. WE UNDERSTAND THAT OUR GREATEST ASSET IS OUR PEOPLE, THEY ARE THE ONES WHO ENABLE US TO MEET OUR MISSION.

I BELIEVE THAT DIVERSITY IS ESSENTIAL TO BUILDING THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE. HUMAN CAPITAL IS REALIZED AS A CRITICAL AREA FOR MANAGEMENT FOCUS. IT IS OUR AIM TO CONTINUE TO TAKE STRIDES TOWARD ENSURING A MORE DIVERSIFIED, EQUALLY ACCESSED FEDERAL AGENCY.

HISPANIC INITIATIVES ARE NOT JUST SEPARATE ISSUES LEFT TO ONE ORGANIZATION TO ATTEMPT TO PROMOTE. BUT INSTEAD, THE GOAL IS FOR ALL OF OUR MINDS TO BE SHAPED SO THAT DIVERSIFIED THINKING IS BECOMING INHERENT IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS WHENEVER IT COMES TO HIRING AND TRAINING FOR THE FUTURE.

AS WE WORK HAND IN HAND WITH SUCH GROUPS AS THE EPA NATIONAL HISPANIC EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (HEPM) WE ARE

GAINING THE INSIGHT AND UNDERSTANDING WE NEED TO MAKE EDUCATED AND WISE DECISIONS REGARDING HISPANIC INITIATIVES.

OECA 'S MISSION CONTINUES TO BE TO ACHIEVE COMPLIANCE WITH OUR NATION'S ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS THROUGH THE USE OF ENFORCEMENT ACTIONS AND COMPLIANCE ASSISTANCE EFFORTS. AS YOU KNOW , I, WITH EACH OF YOU, WILL CONTINUE TO HELP ENSURE THAT THOSE WHO FAIL TO COMPLY WITH THE NATION'S ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS ARE HELD FULLY ACCOUNTABLE.

I STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT A VIGOROUS ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM, BOTH CIVIL AND CRIMINAL, WILL HELP US ACHIEVE STRONG AND MEASURABLE ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES, AND IMPROVE AND PROTECT THE QUALITY OF OUR NATION'S AIR, WATER AND LAND. I AM ALSO VERY CONFIDENT THAT OUR COMPLIANCE PROGRAMS WILL CONTINUE TO BRING MORE AND MORE COMPANIES INTO AND BEYOND COMPLIANCE STANDARDS.

WE HAVE AN ARRAY OF COMPLIANCE ASSISTANCE TOOLS, SUCH AS OUR COMPLIANCE ASSISTANCE CENTERS, WEBSITES, HOTLINES OR GUIDES. ALSO THE INNOVATIVE INCENTIVE PROGRAMS LIKE PERFORMANCE TRACK, WHERE WE ARE RECOGNIZING AND REWARDING COMPANIES WITH ON GOING BEYOND COMPLIANCE TRACK RECORDS WITH PUBLIC RECOGNITION. WE ALSO PROMOTE THE SELF-DISCLOSURE POLICY, WHICH IS A CHANCE FOR INDUSTRIES TO PRO-ACTIVELY SELF AUDIT THEIR FACILITIES AND DETECT, DISCLOSE AND CORRECT VIOLATIONS SO AS TO EITHER AVOID CIVIL PENALTIES OR HAVE THEM SUBSTANTIALLY REDUCED. WITH THESE SORTS OF INNOVATIVE INCENTIVE MODELS WE ARE SEEING COMPANIES COMING INTO COMPLIANCE MORE AND MORE. WHICH IN TURN IS ENSURING THAT AMERICA'S ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS ARE FULLY AND FAITHFULLY ADHERED TO.

JUST AS IMPORTANT TO US HERE AT OECA IS FACTORING IN ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE INTO THE DECISION MAKING EQUATION. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IS DEFINED AS THE FAIR TREATMENT AND MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT OF ALL PEOPLE REGARDLESS OF RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL ORIGIN, CULTURE, EDUCATION, OR

INCOME WITH RESPECT TO THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND ENFORCEMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS, REGULATIONS AND POLICIES. ONE OF OUR EFFORTS IS TO ENABLE REGIONAL AND HEADQUARTERS OFFICES TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES TO INTEGRATE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE INTO EXISTING PROGRAMS REACHING OUT TO OUR HISPANIC COMMUNITIES. OUR OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE OUTREACH PROGRAM IS LED BY DELTA VALENTE. SHE IS RESPONSIBLE ALSO FOR ALL OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE'S TRANSLATION WORK INCLUDING DOCUMENTS, BOOKLETS AND THE SPANISH VERSION OF THE WEBSITE.

LATER TODAY I WILL BE ATTENDING THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA. WE AT EPA HAVE JOINED FORCES WITH THIS ORGANIZATION TO RAISE THE AWARENESS OF LEAD POISONING IN THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY, A GROUP DISPROPORTIONATELY AFFECTED BY THE DISEASE. WITH FUNDING FROM THE EPA, NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA IS ABOUT TO LAUNCH A CAMPAIGN WITH A MESSAGE TO LATINO FAMILIES TO HAVE THEIR CHILDREN TESTED FOR LEAD, AS IT MAY NOT BE A PART OF A ROUTINE EXAM. AS OUR TESTIMONY TELLS THE STORY, WE ARE INTERESTED IN

THE WELL-BEING OF THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY.

AS THE ADMINISTRATOR WHITMAN'S ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE MEMORANDUM, DATED AUGUST 9, 2001, WHERE SHE CATEGORICALLY STATED THAT:

EPA HAS A FIRM COMMITMENT TO THE ISSUE OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND ITS INTEGRATION INTO ALL PROGRAMS, POLICIES, AND ACTIVITIES, CONSISTENT WITH EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTING REGULATIONS.

ANOTHER EFFORT IN OECA IS THE FIFRA (FEDERAL INSECTICIDE, FUNGICIDE AND RODENTICIDE ACT) WORKER SAFETY PROGRAMS (INCLUDING THE WORKER PROTECTION STANDARD (WPS) AND CERTIFICATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS), WHICH ARE ABOUT PROTECTING A POPULATION MOST AT RISK WHO WORK WITH AND IN PROXIMITY TO PESTICIDES OR IN FIELDS WHERE PESTICIDES HAVE BEEN APPLIED, AND LIVE NEARBY AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION. THEY GENERALLY DO NOT SPEAK OR READ ENGLISH AND ARE NOT FAMILIAR WITH THEIR RIGHTS UNDER THE WPS OR OTHER LABOR STANDARDS. MOST WORKERS

ARE SPANISH-SPEAKING, POORLY EDUCATED, NOT U.S. CITIZENS, AND MANY ARE NOT LEGALLY IN THE UNITED STATES. ALL OF THESE FACTORS IDENTIFY THE FIELD WORKERS AND HANDLERS AS A POPULATION AT HIGHER RISK THAN ANY OTHER OCCUPATIONAL LEVEL. AGRICULTURAL WORKERS SUFFER FROM THE HIGHEST RATE OF CHEMICAL-RELATED ILLNESS OF ANY OCCUPATIONAL GROUP.

EPA'S FIFRA WORKER SAFETY PROGRAMS HELP MANY WORKERS WHO DON'T UNDERSTAND THE RISKS POSED BY THE CHEMICALS THEY WORK WITH EVERY DAY. CERTIFICATION, TRAINING AND THE WPS ARE DESIGNED TO PROVIDE A SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN EXPOSURES TO ACUTE PESTICIDE POISONINGS.

MEASURES AS SIMPLE AS TRAINING WORKERS ABOUT PRECAUTIONS AGAINST CHEMICAL EXPOSURE HAVE RESULTED IN A 30% REDUCTION IN ILLNESS AND INJURY IN OTHER INDUSTRIES. AGRO-BUSINESSES GAIN ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM REDUCTION IN THE LOSS OF WORK TIME, REDUCED MEDICAL EXPENSES AND INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY FOR THOSE WORKING IN AGRICULTURE. YVETTE PEREZ-HELLYER OF THE OFFICE OF

REGULATORY ENFORCEMENT-TOXIC, PESTICIDE ENFORCEMENT DIVISION HAS BEEN A LEADER IN WORKING ON ACHIEVING THESE COMMENDABLE RESULTS THROUGH THE FIFRA WORKER SAFETY PROGRAM.

I HAVE HIGHLIGHTED TODAY MANY OF THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE EPA AND THE OFFICE OF ENFORCEMENT AND COMPLIANCE ASSURANCE SPECIFICALLY. IT HAS ALSO BEEN MY DESIRE TO REVEAL TO YOU THAT THE FOUNDATION OF MUCH OF THIS WORK HAS STEMMED FROM A INTEREST IN AND A CONCERN FOR THE OVER ALL BENEFIT OF THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY. I ONLY MENTIONED A FEW OF THE GREAT HISPANIC STAFF THAT WE HAVE ON BOARD IN OECA, BUT THERE ARE MANY OTHERS SERVING AS PROGRAM SUPPORT PERSONNEL AND CRIMINAL ENFORCEMENT STAFF WHO ARE PLAYING A PIVOTAL PART IN THE ACCOMPLISHING OF OUR SHARED GOALS.

TOGETHER, I AM FIRMLY COMMITTED TO MAKING THIS WORK A HALLMARK OF MY TIME AT EPA, AND LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH YOU ALL TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN.

GRACIAS.... THANKS!

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