

**EPA**  
**REGION 7**  
**2023**  
**YEAR IN REVIEW**



**Protecting Human Health and the Environment**



Serving Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Nine Tribal Nations

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EPA Region 7 protects human health and the environment in our nation's Heartland. Our ecosystems are numerous and the range is broad, encompassing the Sandhills of Nebraska, Flint Hills of Kansas, winding Missouri and Mississippi rivers, prairies and plains of Iowa, forests and delta of Missouri, and an abundance of agricultural lands throughout our region.

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**Featured cover photos:**

(Top photo): Mark Twain Memorial Bridge over the Mississippi River outside of Hannibal, Missouri. (Bottom left photo): EPA Region 7 employee Doug Ferguson speaks to participants of the EPA Region 7 Friends and Family Day at the Regional Office in Lenexa, Kansas. (Bottom center photo): A contract crew works on cleaning up oil at a discharge site in Washington County, Kansas. (Bottom right photo): Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister and Region 7 Deputy Administrator Ed Chu speak with residents of Alma, Kansas, after a Clean School Bus Program event.

# YEAR IN REVIEW

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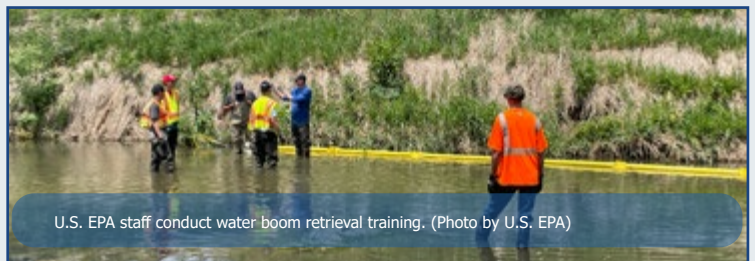
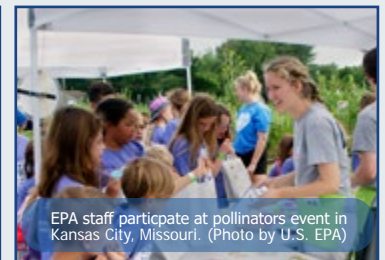
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# SEVEN STRONG

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN THE HEARTLAND

Region 7 made tremendous progress over the past year toward protecting human health and the environment. As I reflect on our efforts, the word “community” comes to mind. With the help of unprecedented funding opportunities through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, Region 7 increased its capacity to engage and collaborate with our communities, resulting in more meaningful connections with the people, places, and organizations we serve.

For Region 7, “community” encompasses citizens, nonprofit organizations, municipal leaders, federal agencies, businesses, and academia. We worked closely with these groups to listen, learn, and collaborate on ways to create a more resilient future. Most importantly, we are leveraging these engagements into tangible, locally designed outcomes that will benefit those who are most vulnerable to an ever-changing climate.

First, we strengthened our capacity to better support our stakeholders by bolstering our workforce. Region 7 completed 112 permanent hiring actions and provided 76 internal detail and promotion opportunities. We also implemented an intensive summer Pathways internship program, welcoming 26 new interns to the region.

We started 2023 by visiting several cities to celebrate Brownfields Job Training Grant awards. These grants will empower citizens to obtain skills for future, sustainable careers in environmental health and safety. One of those engagements took place at the Ozark Correctional Center, where justice-involved individuals are receiving job training for future careers in environmental cleanup.

We continued to focus our efforts on climate resilience by collaborating with our local, state, and federal partners to develop strategies that will best serve our communities. We facilitated and supported task forces and learning events focused on climate, Lead (Pb) prevention, waste management, agriculture, water, and compliance. These meaningful discussions are part of our whole-of-government approach to aggressively tackle the climate crisis in our country.

This year, we connected with our Tribal partners by increasing our visits to Indian Country. We presented multiple grant awards, conducted site visits, and attended listening sessions. The Tribes we serve are a key component of our community and we remain committed to cultivating those relationships.

We engaged our academic community to foster learning, mentorship and collaboration. This year, we developed a Memorandum of Understanding with Harris-Stowe State University and conducted several presentations at the University of Kansas.

We visited the farthest reaches of our region by conducting a multi-city Investing in America tour to present millions of dollars in Multipurpose, Assessment, Revolving Loan Fund, and Cleanup Brownfields grants to rural communities in the Heartland. We met with civic, community, and business leaders and viewed multiple Brownfields projects in progress.

We continued to enrich our internal Region 7 community by upholding our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. We raised the Pride and Juneteenth flags for the first time at our Regional Office. In addition, we offered several learning opportunities through our ongoing special interest programs.

Most importantly, environmental justice informed our decision-making and activities this past year and it remains to be one of Region 7’s top priorities. We opened our first-ever Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers at Wichita State University. These centers will help provide technical assistance, training, and related support to communities in the Region with EJ concerns.

Region 7 continues to grow stronger and more resilient due to the dedication of our workforce and the financial backing of our administration. Although we have increased our operational tempo exponentially, our staff answered the call without hesitation and maintained the highest level of support and service. I am thankful for the progress made thus far and I look forward to what Region 7 will accomplish in the year ahead for our community.



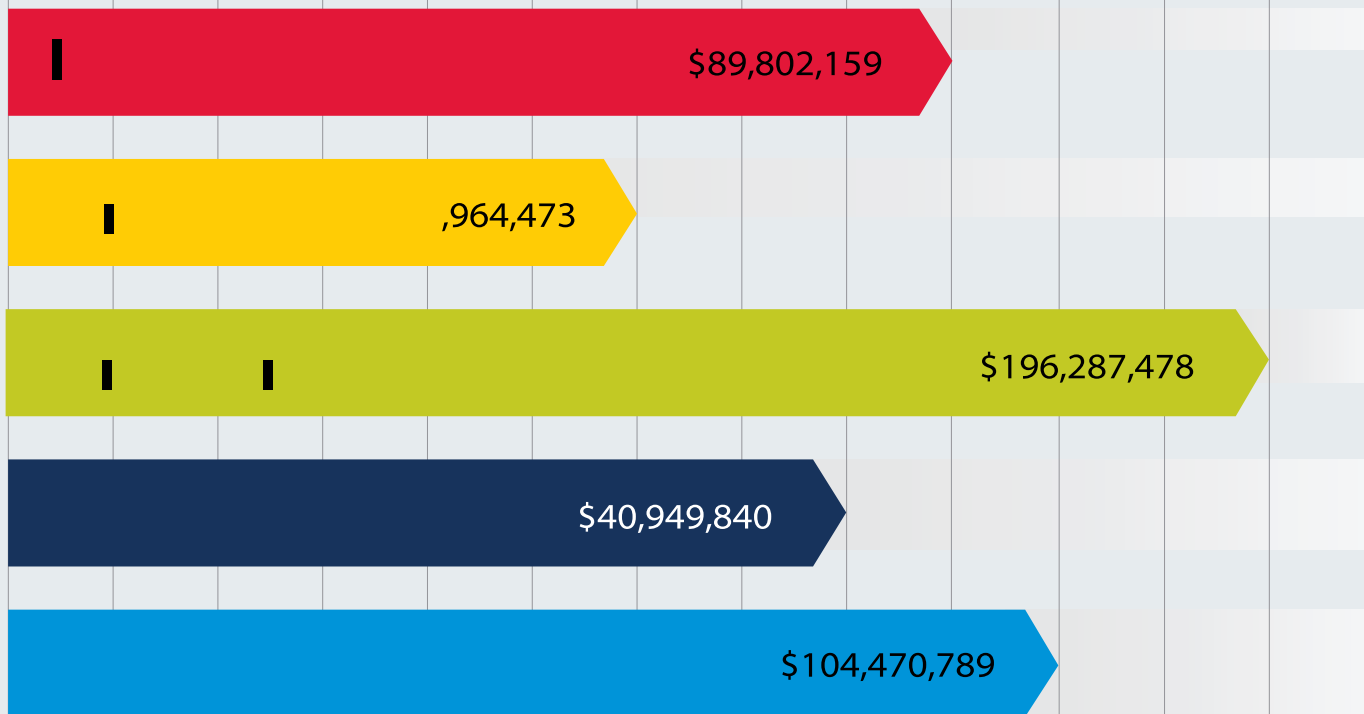
**MEG MCCOLLISTER**  
Regional Administrator

Seven Strong!

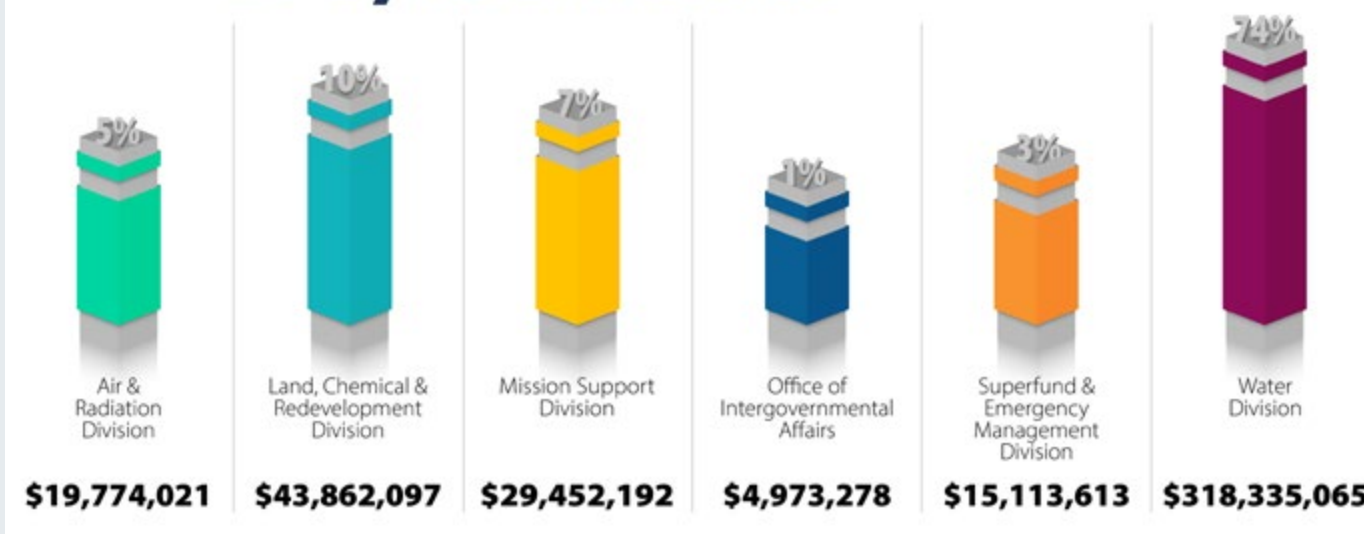
*Meghan A. McCollister*

# FUNDING BY STATE & PROGRAM

INVESTING IN A HEALTHIER FUTURE



## FY 23 | State and Tribe Funding by R7 Divisions



\*Dollar figures are calculated for fiscal year 2023, running from Oct. 1, 2022, to Sept. 31, 2023.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 7

# RESPONDING TO A CHANGING CLIMATE



Through our Region's rollout of innovations like the Climate Pollution Reduction Grants Program, Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, Regional-ORD Applied Research Programs, as well as our team's international contributions in the fight against climate change, our staff is actively contributing to a sustainable and equitable climate future.



## EPA Region 7 Announces Finalization of Climate Adaptation Implementation Plan

Tackling the climate crisis is one of the top priorities of EPA here in the Heartland. However, effective action requires an effective plan. In FY 2023, Region 7 successfully finalized and published its FY22-23 Region 7 Climate Adaptation Implementation Plan. Released in October 2023, this strategic initiative aligns with [President Biden's Executive Order 14008: Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad](#), demonstrating a proactive and collaborative approach to environmental stewardship.

The plan outlines 28 priority actions to be taken in FY22-23, demonstrating Region 7's commitment to impactful climate action. An addendum for FY24-25 identifies both continuing and new priority actions, ensuring that the plan remains relevant and responsive to emerging challenges.

The release of Region 7's plan is part of a larger nationwide effort by EPA, with similar plans developed by all regional offices and major national program offices. These plans are dynamic, evolving with new data and insights, and underline EPA's comprehensive commitment to addressing climate change.

Recognizing that climate disruption often disproportionately affects overburdened communities, the FY22-23 Region 7 Climate Adaptation Implementation Plan pays special attention to the needs of low-income communities, communities of color, children, the elderly, tribes, and indigenous peoples. EPA's commitment to engaging with and



U.S. EPA staff member conducts water testing. (Photo by U.S. EPA)

supporting these communities underscores its dedication to principles of environmental justice and equity.

***“The release of the Implementation Plans today marks significant progress in EPA’s efforts to ensure we are doing everything we can to protect human health and the environment.”***

— EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan

This sentiment encapsulates the essence of the Climate Adaptation Implementation Plan – a blueprint for a resilient, equitable, and sustainable future.



Read [EPA Region 7's Climate Adaptation Implementation Plan](#).

- Read more information on [EPA's 2021 Climate Adaptation Action Plan](#).
- View all 20 [Climate Adaptation Implementation Plans](#) that were developed by EPA's major offices.



## Climate Action KC

In Region 7, we strive to take climate-related actions that are measurable, sustainable, address a specific gap or need, and make a difference in our communities. In September, EPA Region 7 joined corporate leaders, climate advocates, and other critical voices across the region to address climate challenges at the 2023 Climate Summit in Kansas City. Region 7 staff shared information on what's to come, and how all communities can benefit through historic funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act.

U.S. EPA Region 7's information booth at the 2023 Climate Action KC event. (Photo by U.S. EPA)

## Funding for a Healthier Future

During 2023 Climate Week in March, EPA announced a major initiative under President Biden's Investing in America Agenda. EPA launched \$4.6 billion in competitive grants through the Climate Pollution Reduction Grants (CPRG) Program, part of the larger \$5 billion allocation from the Inflation Reduction Act, marking a significant advancement in America's approach to climate change and environmental justice. This initiative is crucial for achieving our goal of reducing climate pollution by 50% to 52% by 2030 and aligns with the Justice40 Initiative, ensuring that federal climate investment benefits flow to marginalized communities.

This grant program has great potential to bring about substantial change in combating climate issues and positively impacting the environment here in Region 7. The program's focus extends beyond reducing greenhouse gas emissions to delivering economic and health benefits, especially to communities with environmental justice concerns, while prioritizing actions that lead to the most significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

In tandem, EPA in April 2023 released the framework for the implementation of the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), a transformative \$27 billion investment from the Inflation Reduction Act. This fund aims to mobilize financing and capital for greenhouse gas and air pollution-reducing projects, with support focused on underserved communities. The GGRF comprises three grant competitions: \$14 billion National Clean Investment Fund, \$6 billion

Clean Communities Investment Accelerator, and \$7 billion Solar for All competition.

The GGRF is not just a financial tool but a commitment to inclusive and equitable climate action. It acknowledges the need to provide opportunities and benefits to communities historically impacted by environmental degradation and economic disparities. This fund is set to be a catalyst for transitioning to a clean energy future that is fair and just for all communities.

Together, the CPRG and GGRF programs represent a significant milestone in America's response to climate change, not just here in the Midwest but across the country. They signify a new era of environmental stewardship, ensuring the equitable distribution of clean energy benefits and reduced pollution, particularly to historically overlooked and affected communities. These initiatives are a decisive step towards a cleaner, more sustainable, and equitable future for the United States.



[Learn more about Climate Pollution Reduction Grants](#)

- [Read CPRG Planning Grant Program Guidance](#)
- [Sign up for notifications about Climate Pollution Reduction Grants](#)
- [Learn more about the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund](#)



### EPA Announces \$3M Each to Missouri and Nebraska to Fund Innovative Projects That Tackle Climate Pollution

In FY23, EPA allocated **\$3 million** to both Missouri and Nebraska as part of the Climate Pollution Reduction Grants Program, funded by President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act. This initiative is designed to develop strategies for cutting climate pollution and fostering clean energy economies. The Missouri Department of Natural Resources and Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy are leading the charge in their states through collaborating with local entities to develop comprehensive climate action plans that prioritize engagement with low-income and disadvantaged communities.



## Regional Monitoring Networks

Climate change poses specific challenges for the Heartland's freshwater ecosystems. That's why in FY23, EPA's Office of Research and Development worked with its regional offices, states, tribes, and other entities to establish Regional Monitoring Networks (RMNs) and climate change monitoring sites in Central Plains streams. RMNs aim to detect subtle, climate-related trends in freshwater wadable streams in a decision-relevant time frame by first establishing baseline environmental conditions, and then by providing consistent, long-term monitoring data.

In line with this effort, Region 7's Water Division (WD) and Laboratory Services and Applied Science Division (LSASD) have identified and sampled sites with similar environmental and biological characteristics in the region. The RMNs will continue to gather biological, thermal, hydrologic, physical habitat, and water chemistry data on an annual basis for 10 or more years. By using standardized methods for data collection, RMNs ensure data reliability and comparability, which is crucial for informed environmental policy-making and supporting initiatives like the Clean Water Act.

## ROAR – Flowtography Project

In FY23, WD and LSASD staff from EPA Region 7 pioneered an initiative that utilizes time-lapse photography and machine learning to monitor small, ungauged streams vulnerable to climate shifts. Staff deployed three time-lapse cameras on important Climate Change/Regional Monitoring Network (RMN) streams with active-flow monitoring, while staff interns worked tirelessly ranking several thousand images on the project's Photo Explorer website to help improve the machine-learning model. This approach not only provides critical insights into water flow dynamics and patterns, but also represents a paradigm shift in environmental monitoring – it's cost-effective, scalable, and deeply insightful. As the project expands to encompass wetlands and lakes, it continues to highlight the Region's role in shaping a sustainable future in the face of climate change.

## Region 7 Participates in IPCC



Amy Shields, a Water Division supervisor, joined the U.S. delegation to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in Switzerland. Her involvement in the IPCC's sixth Assessment Report went beyond national representation; it was a demonstration of her expertise and dedication to global climate action.

Shields, along with her fellow delegates, played a crucial role in collaborating with IPCC authors and member countries, contributing significantly to the U.S. government's strategic input. Their work culminated in the pivotal drafting of the final Synthesis Report in March 2023, a comprehensive document addressing global emissions, the impacts of climate change on ecosystems, biodiversity, and human communities. Shields' participation as one of the four U.S. scientists in the delegation underscored EPA Region 7's significant role in driving forward global climate policy and resilience.

## Embassy Science Fellows



Chelsea Paxson, a Water Division staff member, worked to advance global and subnational climate efforts on behalf of EPA Region 7, while participating in the Embassy Science Fellows and International Technical Assistance Program during FY23. This program, designed to leverage the expertise of U.S. government

scientists, aims to build relationships and partnerships that not only advance American foreign policy and scientific priorities, but also promote U.S. scientific norms and interests globally. Paxson's project in Guatemala City focused on protecting an undeveloped urban area and advocating for nature-based solutions to improve water quality in a ravine park. The project encompassed water quality monitoring, water quantity recharge, solid waste management, habitat restoration, forest conservation, and urban green space protection – all crucial elements in fostering resiliency against climate change across the globe.



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 7

# WORKING WITH THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR



Region 7 continues to engage in creative, collaborative approaches with the agriculture sector to explore and identify opportunities for innovative environmental solutions aimed at protecting public health and the environment and increasing resiliency to protect farms and communities from climate impacts.



## Climate-Smart Ag Roundtables

The role that agricultural production plays in anthropogenic climate change, as well as how farming and ranching practices might look in the future, is a topic of great complexity.

In order to gather a more holistic view of this issue, EPA Region 7 staff fostered meaningful dialogue with our region's agricultural leaders throughout FY 2023, as part of our strategy to address climate change both in and through the agricultural sector. In FY23 alone, Region 7 orchestrated over a dozen climate-smart agriculture roundtables, listening sessions, outreach events, and other external engagements. These gatherings have been vibrant hubs of discussion, bringing together diverse voices on climate resilience in agriculture.

Attendees representing Kansas' agricultural stakeholders included the Kansas Secretary of Agriculture; Kansas USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and Rural Development directors; the Kansas Farm Bureau President; Kansas members of the EPA Farm, Ranch and Rural Communities Committee; and many farmers, ranchers, and agricultural leaders from across the state.

These roundtables further provided a platform for members of the farming and ranching community, along with Kansas state agencies, to voice their concerns, ideas, and experience.

In a similar vein, Region 7 held a roundtable in 2023 with all land-grant universities within Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. This meeting was focused on exploring ongoing efforts and future needs in the climate-smart agriculture arena to leverage the deep well of knowledge among Region 7's university partners. Through this collaboration, the roundtable attendees were able to pinpoint potential areas where EPA's involvement could have the greatest impact on tackling anticipated climate challenges most effectively.

EPA Region 7 seeks to build a robust network of individuals working at the intersection of agriculture and climate change through these climate-smart roundtable discussions. So far, this network has proven to be essential for disseminating information about EPA programs and funding opportunities more effectively, ensuring that those at the frontline of agriculture are well-equipped with the knowledge and resources to adapt and thrive in a changing climate.



### Administrator Regan Visits Bucyrus, Kansas

In February 2023, EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan visited the Guetterman Brothers Family Farm in Bucyrus, Kansas – a living example of the intersection between agricultural innovation and environmental stewardship.

Administrator Regan and EPA Region 7 representatives were joined by a host of stakeholders, including the Kansas Secretary of Agriculture, directors from various USDA departments, the Kansas Farm Bureau President, and members of the EPA Farm, Ranch, and Rural Communities Committee. This assembly of such a diverse group underlined the whole-of-government approach being adopted to hasten climate-positive outcomes, while bolstering our rural economy in Region 7.

Of this visit, Administrator Regan shared: "There's nothing like getting to see firsthand the passion and ingenuity of America's agricultural leaders. Our farmers and ranchers – like the folks I met in Bucyrus, Kansas – are developing and implementing innovative, climate-smart solutions. And EPA will always make sure America's farmers and ranchers have a seat at the table to ensure they can produce an abundant and uninterrupted supply of food, feed, fuel, and fiber."

We at EPA Region 7 act on the belief that agriculture and environmental stewardship can harmoniously coexist for a sustainable future. As we move forward, our Agency remains committed to engaging with and supporting our nation's farmers and ranchers. Their invaluable contributions to both environmental conservation and the agricultural sector are essential in our journey toward a more sustainable and resilient future.

**Photo Caption:** U.S. EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan tours some farming equipment at the Guetterman Brothers Family Farm in Bucyrus, Kansas. (Photo by U.S. EPA)



## Environmental Education at the Iowa State Fair

On Aug. 7, 2023, EPA Region 7 said hello to the people of Iowa and their incredible fried cuisine at one of America's oldest and largest agricultural expositions – the Iowa State Fair! With a history stretching back to 1854, the Des Moines event was the perfect backdrop for EPA Region 7 to share a message of “Working Together for Healthy Rural Families.”

EPA representatives were excited to have this opportunity to showcase various competitive grant funding programs with fairgoers, including Solar for All (made possible by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act). Fair-goers were also able to see and tour Region 7's mobile laboratory and emergency response command vehicle.



U.S. EPA Region 7 staff attend the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines, Iowa.

## Region 7 at the National Association of Farm Broadcasting

EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister hosted the Senior Advisor for Agriculture to the EPA Administrator Rod Snyder, and EPA Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention (OCSP) Assistant Administrator Michal Ilana Freedhoff at the annual National Association of Farm Broadcasting (NAFB) Trade Talk event at the Westin Crown Center Hotel in Kansas City, Missouri.

NAFB Trade Talk is a can't-miss event for leaders in the agricultural industry and provides opportunities for networking and connecting with ag media. EPA staff discussed priority topics including: Waters of the U.S.; Renewable Fuel Standards Program; pesticide availability and process; partnerships with agriculture and agriculture's seat at the table; climate change; infrastructure and environmental justice.



EPA Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention Assistant Administrator Michal Ilana Freedhoff, EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister, EPA Region 7 Ag Advisor Doug Jones, and Senior Advisor for Agriculture to the EPA Administrator Rod Snyder attend the annual National Association of Farm Broadcasting Trade Talk.

## Cultivate KC and New Roots for Refugees

Farming isn't just for the region's rural residents. Urban farming has a role in the future of agriculture, too! In February 2023, EPA Region 7 invited urban farming advocates from Cultivate KC and New Roots for Refugees to attend a climate-smart agriculture roundtable discussion. Representatives from the two organizations were able to voice their perspectives on how a multi-agency approach can accelerate socially and environmentally conscious farming methods.



(Left) EPA Deputy Administrator Janet McCabe, (second from left) Kansas City, Kansas, Mayor Tyrone Garner, and (far right) EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister pose for a photo with members of Cultivate KC. (Photo by U.S. EPA)



## Safe Use of Registered Pesticides

EPA is committed to ensuring that pesticide certification programs are not just compliant, but exemplary in their effectiveness. In FY23, EPA Region 7 emerged as a leader in the safe application of pesticides – a vital aspect of environmental protection and public health.

Region 7, working in close collaboration with each of its states and tribes, embarked on a thorough, multi-step review process. This involved meticulous assessments and feedback from various EPA offices, including the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention and the Office of General Counsel.

This achievement, through Region 7’s Land, Chemical, and Redevelopment Division, has ensured that farmers throughout Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and nine tribal nations can continue the safe use of registered pesticides.

EPA Region 7’s success in this endeavor not only met the regulatory requirements outlined in the Certification of Pesticide Applicators Rule, but also exemplified how combining rigorous environmental governance goals with effective collaboration can ultimately benefit farmers and safeguard public health within the region.

## Outreach with Migrant Farm Workers

Migrant farm workers are often at greater risk of environmental exposure to pesticides and lead. In an effort to ensure that Region 7’s protection of human health extends to all of those in the Heartland, our Land, Chemical, and Redevelopment Division (LCRD) and Environmental Justice team focused increased attention on delivering crucial information and resources to these vulnerable populations in FY23.

With the aim of taking a proactive approach toward directly addressing the needs of the migrant workforce in agriculture, LCRD created and filled a new pesticide position requiring Spanish fluency. LCRD staff also undertook a project to collect information on agencies and organizations that serve migrant farm workers in the region. EPA Region 7 began work to use this data to help build bridges with these groups, so as to assess and deliver needed Worker Protection Standard protections while also assisting state pesticide lead agencies in enhancing their programs.

Further, six outreach events were held in FY23 with migrant farm workers, which emphasized pesticide safety and the promotion of Integrated Pest Management (IPM). Online outreach was also conducted through geographic microtargeting on social media platforms, resulting in a series of 12 targeted campaigns in both English and Spanish.



EPA Region 7 staff participates in the Migrant Farmworkers Assistance Fund outreach event in Lexington, Missouri. (Photo by U.S. EPA)



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 7

# PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM LEAD EXPOSURE



EPA Region 7 is committed to reducing lead exposure, especially for children, by creating lead-safe environments. There are numerous potential lead exposure pathways including through drinking water pipes, the air we breathe, lead-based paint in houses and consumer products, and the soil we garden and play in.



## Unveiling a New Lead Strategy

In a pivotal move, EPA unveiled a comprehensive lead (Pb) strategy in October 2022, which exemplifies its dedication to advancing environmental justice and equity as outlined by the Biden-Harris administration. This strategy harnesses the full spectrum of EPA's authorities, expertise, and resources to curtail lead exposure in overburdened communities.

### Key Actions

The cornerstone of EPA's lead strategy lies in its multifaceted approach to reducing lead exposure in communities grappling with pollution and other pressing health and social challenges.

A pivotal component of this strategy is the development of updated, residential soil lead guidance tailored to contaminated sites. This guidance stands to revolutionize screening protocols for sites and facilities under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA or Superfund) and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) corrective action authorities. If finalized, these recommendations will fortify the regulatory framework, ensuring a comprehensive and effective response to residential lead exposure.

The infusion of financial support from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law marks a transformative moment for EPA's endeavors. Bolstered by unprecedented investments, EPA is poised to expedite the cleanup of lead at Superfund sites. This financial injection not only underscores the government's commitment to environmental remediation, but also empowers EPA to implement tangible solutions in communities grappling with the detrimental effects of lead contamination.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law has proven to be a game changer for EPA's mission to combat lead exposure. With this legislative windfall, EPA is not only strengthening its resolve, but also injecting unprecedented financial resources into the cleanup efforts at Superfund sites.

This infusion of funds underscores the government's commitment to proactive measures, ensuring that communities burdened by lead pollution witness transformative changes that safeguard public health.



### EPA Unveils Historic National Lead Strategy in Omaha, Nebraska

Region 7 unveiled its historic National Lead Strategy before a cooperative agreement renewal ceremony with the Douglas County Health Department in Omaha, Nebraska.

Omaha was once home to a large lead smelter and lead battery recycling plant that are estimated to have released over 400 million pounds (200,000 tons) of lead particles into the environment, with much of that ending up in residential areas.

The National Lead Strategy reflects the Agency's commitment to protecting children from harmful exposures to lead, while reducing disproportionate impacts of lead exposure on high-risk communities.

Omaha was chosen as the location to announce EPA's National Lead Strategy as historic smelting operations there resulted in the largest residential lead Superfund site in the United States.

Following the announcement of the National Lead Strategy, EPA Region 7 held a ceremony to recognize the seven-year, \$12.7 million renewal of the Agency's cooperative agreement with the Douglas County Health Department (DCHD), with \$1.8 million awarded annually.

The agreement renewal provided funding for the county's free blood lead screening services for children 7 years old and under, as well as pregnant and nursing women, residing within the Omaha Lead Superfund Site. The renewal will also provide funding for indoor lead dust screening, as well as education and outreach to medical professionals within the site boundary.

*Photo above: Office of Land and Emergency Management Deputy Assistant Administrator Carlton Waterhouse (right of check) and EPA Region 7 Deputy Administrator Ed Chu (far left) present the Douglas County Health Department with a ceremonial check for \$12.7 million. (Photo credit: U.S. EPA)*

## R7 Lead Summit: A Collaborative Stride Toward Safer Communities

In September 2023, the R7 Lead Summit brought together federal agencies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, and the Department of Health and Human Services, in a resounding commitment to address the pervasive issue of lead exposure. The collaborative effort underscores a whole-of-government approach, pooling expertise and resources to effect transformative change across communities.

This strategy encompasses cleanup initiatives, capacity building, health monitoring, worker training, and overall community development. The collaborative vision aligns seamlessly with the goals of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, providing a critical framework to expedite efforts in preventing lead exposure.

The law, a linchpin in the summit's narrative, is poised to make a tangible impact by prioritizing communities often overlooked by environmental policies. This strategic focus aims to address historical disparities in exposure, ensuring that the most underserved populations benefit from targeted interventions.

Central to the success of the initiative is the ongoing partnership with stakeholders. Leveraging this collaboration enables the acceleration of efforts to provide more pediatric lead tests, a crucial step in identifying and mitigating lead exposure in children. Additionally, the initiative seeks to broaden its



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Region 7 Administrator Ulysses "Deke" Clayborn speaks at the Region 7 Lead Summit in Kansas City, Missouri. (Photo by U.S. EPA)

impact through comprehensive outreach initiatives, informing communities about lead exposure and preventive measures.

Another key component of the collaborative effort is the promotion of safe work practices. By ensuring that renovations and abatement work are conducted safely, reliably, and effectively, the initiative not only addresses immediate concerns but also contributes to the long-term health and well-being of communities. This commitment to safety reflects a dedication to positive health impacts, demonstrating a holistic approach to lead exposure prevention.

In essence, the R7 Lead Summit marks a pivotal moment in the fight against lead exposure. Through a coordinated, whole-of-government approach, the initiative aims to create lasting change in communities across the nation. The convergence of expertise, resources, and a commitment to partnership sets the stage for a future where lead exposure is not just reduced but eradicated, paving the way for healthier and safer communities.



### Region 7 Lead Task Force

Established in 2018, the Task Force brought together agency leaders to shape its mission and focus, pooling resources for future lead projects. Over the past few years, the Task Force has been a catalyst for positive change, tirelessly working on initiatives to safeguard the health of families and children in the region.

Region 7's Lead Task Force promises a brighter, healthier future for the region's children. Together, they stand united against the insidious threat of lead, ensuring that even the smallest levels of exposure do not hinder the physical and intellectual development of the next generation.



## Lead-Based Paint Violations

EPA enforcement programs ensure that companies and individuals that violate federal laws addressing exposure to lead or whose actions may endanger human health and the environmental are held accountable.

In FY23 alone, 14 home renovation companies in Kansas and Missouri agreed to pay over \$160,000 collectively in penalties to EPA to resolve alleged violations of the federal Toxic Substances Control Act.

Companies that perform home renovations, or hire subcontractors to perform renovations, are required to comply with regulations under EPA's Lead Renovation, Repair and Painting (RRP) Program. These regulations include requirements to obtain certification from EPA prior to performing renovations, as well as compliance with lead safety practices, records retention, and notification to homeowners about the hazards of renovation-related lead exposure.

The goal of EPA's compliance assurance program is to protect public health, deter would-be violators, and level the playing field for companies that follow our nation's laws related to lead exposure and contamination.



Information on these programs is available from the [Agency's Lead website](#).

## Region 7 Hosts Four Lead Awareness Sessions

Region 7 staff participated in numerous lead education and outreach events throughout the year. Staff distributed informational materials covering lead renovation, lead disclosure and lead hazard education. Enhancing Lead-Safe Work Practices Through Education and Outreach activities were completed for three communities. Both the Train-the-Trainer and Understanding Lead information sessions were provided. These sessions helped community members recognize potential sources of lead exposure, understand impacts and effects of lead exposure, learn actions to reduce lead exposure and the importance of blood lead level testing for children.





U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 7

# PROTECTING OUR WATER SOURCES



When the water in our rivers, lakes, and oceans becomes polluted, it can endanger wildlife, make our drinking water unsafe, and threaten the waters where we swim and fish.



## Funding Clean Drinking Water and Infrastructure

In 2023, Region 7 announced a total of \$379 million in water infrastructure improvement grants in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law made over \$50 billion available for water and wastewater infrastructure improvements across the country between FY 2022 and FY 2026 to strengthen the nation's water infrastructure and provide resources to address key challenges, including climate change, removing lead pipes, and emerging contaminants like per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The funding will support regional communities in upgrading essential water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure, protecting water bodies and public health.

The funding was divided into: \$168.6 million for essential, drinking water infrastructure upgrades through the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF); \$128.4 million to the Clean Water State Revolving Fund (CWSRF) in Region 7's four states; and nearly \$82 million to address emerging contaminants like per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in drinking water for communities across the region.

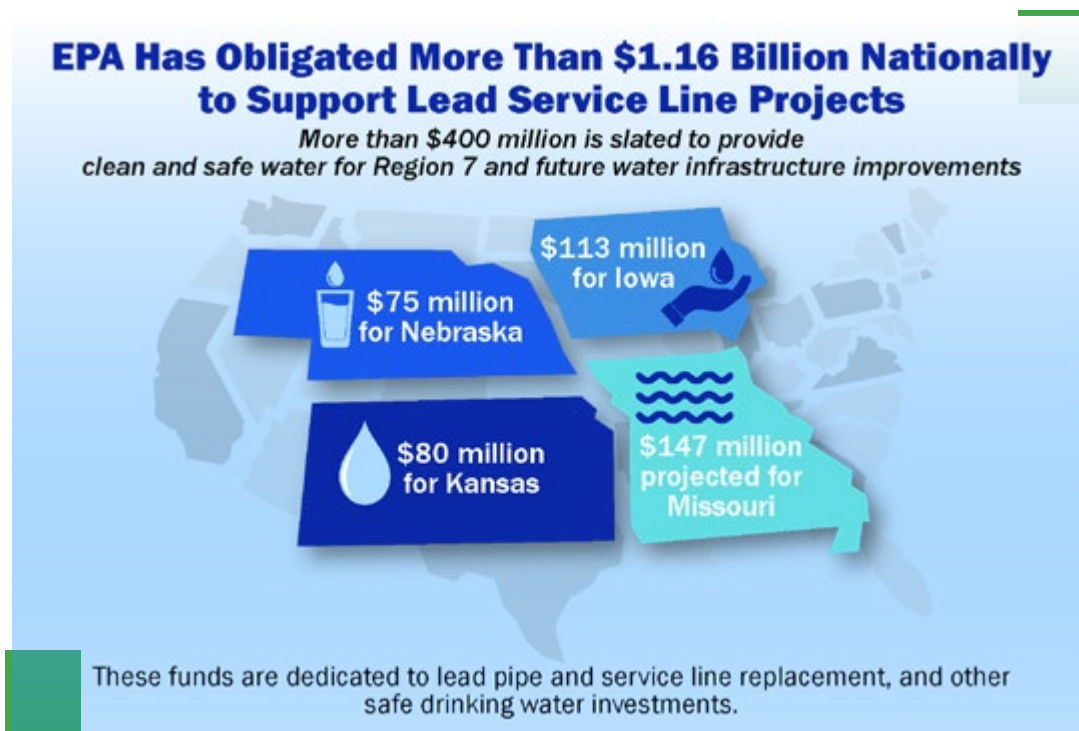
The CWSRFs have been the foundation of water infrastructure investments for over 30 years, providing low-cost financing for local projects across America.

The DWSRF allotments to states are based on the results of EPA's 7th Drinking Water Infrastructure Needs Survey and Assessment (DWINSA). The

survey assesses the nation's public water systems' infrastructure needs every four years and the findings are used to allocate DWSRF grants to states.

EPA's 7th DWINSA included survey questions focused on lead service lines for the first time, and a portion of the total funding will be provided specifically for lead service line identification and replacement.

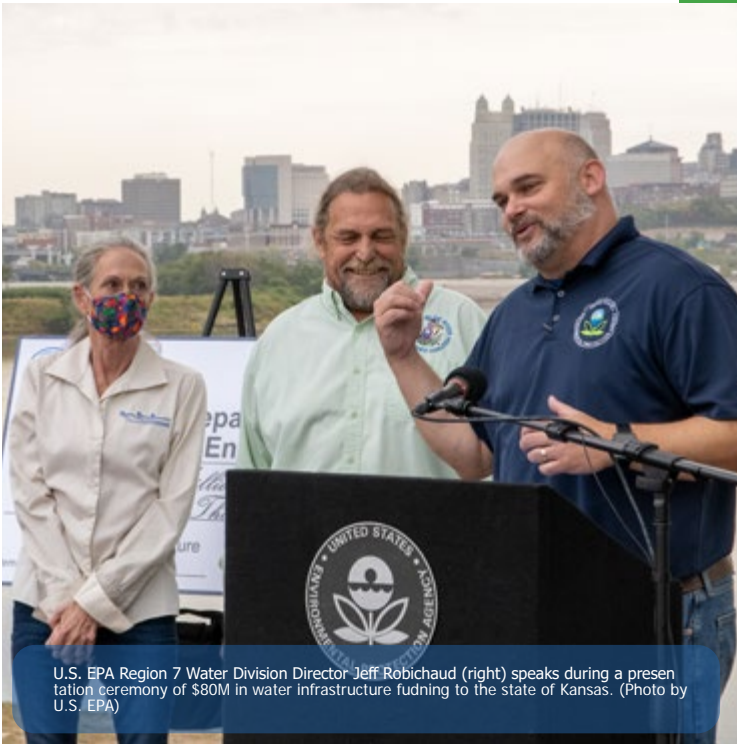
The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law invests \$5 billion over five years to help communities reduce PFAS in drinking water. The \$82 million allotment to Region 7's four states will be used to prioritize infrastructure



and source water treatment for pollutants, like PFAS and other emerging contaminants, and to conduct water quality testing in those states.

EPA is also releasing the "Emerging Contaminants in Small or Disadvantaged Communities Grant Program" implementation document, providing states and communities with the necessary information to use this funding to address local water quality and public health challenges. These grants enable communities to improve local water infrastructure and reduce emerging contaminants by implementing solutions and necessary treatments.





U.S. EPA Region 7 Water Division Director Jeff Robichaud (right) speaks during a presentation ceremony of \$80M in water infrastructure funding to the state of Kansas. (Photo by U.S. EPA)

## Protecting our Water Through Innovation and Collaboration

Region 7 has implemented and engaged in several partnerships designed to increase innovation and find new solutions to address water infrastructure concerns throughout the region. In FY23, the Region awarded universities, advocacy groups, and local communities for their research and innovation to develop solutions to face climate change, provide access to clean water, and protect water bodies in Region 7.

Under the Environmental Education Grants program, Region 7 was able to provide \$99,795 in funding to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) in August. UNL will use the funding to expand their Know Your Well Project and develop a science curriculum that will be rolled out to over 100 rural Nebraska high school students with the goals of increasing science literacy, awareness of agricultural practices, and groundwater stewardship.

In October, Region 7 announced a \$3.2 million research grant to Iowa State University to fund research national efforts to reduce technological and institutional barriers to expanded water reuse,

enabling university researchers to integrate technological, institutional, and regulatory decision-making processes to accelerate water reuse adoption by addressing issues in water quality and availability in small, rural communities.

The following month, Region 7 provided \$740,014 in funding to the University of Missouri to conduct research with community partners to assess how different populations value water quality improvements and aquatic resources in Midwestern reservoirs, addressing research gaps and evaluating economic benefits and costs, including predicting environmental justice and other distributional consequences of surface water quality improvements nationwide.

Region 7 recognized the City of Hastings, Nebraska, for its clean water infrastructure innovation through EPA's George F. Ames Performance and Innovation in the SRF (State Revolving Fund) Creating Environmental Success (PISCES) 2022 national recognition program. The city was recognized for Excellence in Problem-Solving for their Aquifer Storage and Restoration project, which was conducted using funds allocated through the Nebraska Clean Water SRF. The project decreased nitrate contaminant levels and provided an economical engineering solution for providing treated drinking water to the city's residents.

Region 7 has also continued efforts to gather data in underserved communities with regional urban water monitoring. This data will allow the Region to observe potential water quality impacts in urban lakes and streams and integrate environmental justice considerations into the overall regional monitoring strategy.

Through the Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP), Region 7 is funding dedicated ambassador positions that coordinate, connect, and collaborate to break down Agency silos to meet the needs of underserved communities in our region.

In 2023, program highlights included working with the U.S. Forest Service to get funding in place for ambassadors at two locations. Blue River hired an ambassador, Magali Rojas, and the announcement for the Meramec/Big River ambassador was expected by spring 2024.

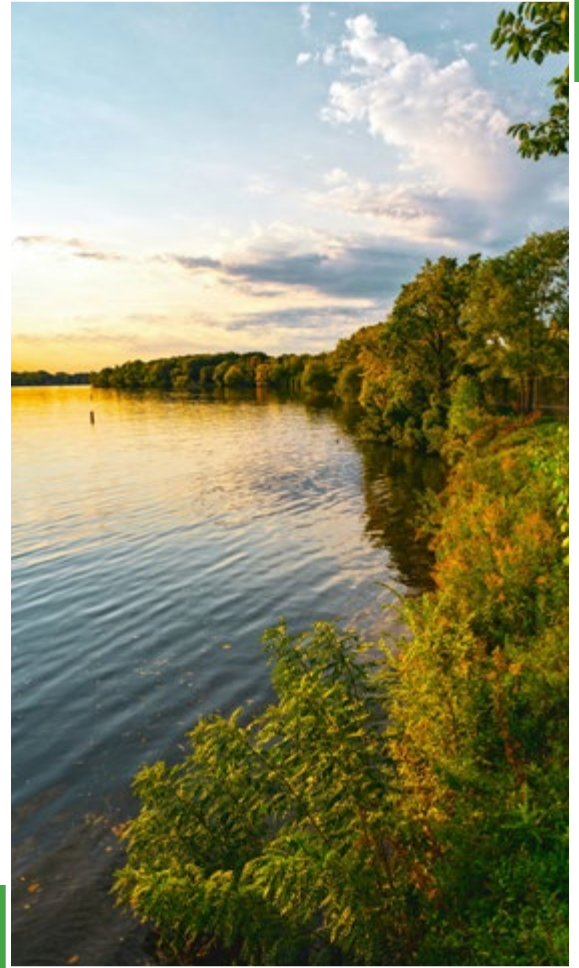
## Upper Mississippi River Basin Association

In 2023, Region 7 engaged with community partners to address water quality concerns and implement standards and regulations for water safety.

Our Standards and Water Quality Branch (SAW) engaged with the Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA) as members of their water quality executive committee and water quality task force. These executive committee meetings are held quarterly to facilitate collaborative decision-making between the five state partners and relevant federal partners. The work of the task force is of a more limited scope, focusing on monitoring the status of the water quality of the Upper Mississippi River.

Accomplishments for the year included the publication of the “How Clean Is the River?” report in January 2023, which analyzed water quality trends for 19 parameters within the river. SAW staff also served on a workshop planning committee for a series of nutrient reduction workshops funded by EPA Headquarters to accelerate the implementation of state nutrient reduction strategies within the UMRBA states.

Additionally, SAW has begun the development of a formal Memorandum of Understanding with UMRBA to formalize our relationship and identify potential areas for collaboration/support regarding the implementation of their Mississippi River monitoring strategy.



U.S. EPA Region 7 staff and local leaders discuss water infrastructure needs and challenges in competing for State Revolving Funds at the Mississippi River Corridor Summit. (Photo by U.S. EPA)

## Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative

Region 7 continued its collaboration with the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative (MRCTI) to develop community-specific models and methods for Sustainable Materials Management (SMM) implementation, using a pilot study of plastic waste along the Mississippi River. Our Region was selected for a Regional-ORD Applied Research (ROAR) project in 2022 to study plastic pollution in three MRCTI communities. Together with ORD and Regions 4, 5 and 6, Region 7 is leading the ROAR project, which will continue through FY24.

Region 7 is working to protect and restore aquatic ecosystems with the Water Division Monitoring Strategy, which entails partnering with our states and tribes to develop regional strategies focused on the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. The overall strategy will support the regional monitoring network, which has established climate change monitoring sites in Central Plains streams.



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 7

# ENSURING CLEAN AIR FOR ALL



The composition of trace gases in the atmosphere, such as nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxides, plays an important role in affecting the climate. Air pollution can adversely affect critical functions of the atmosphere in many ways.

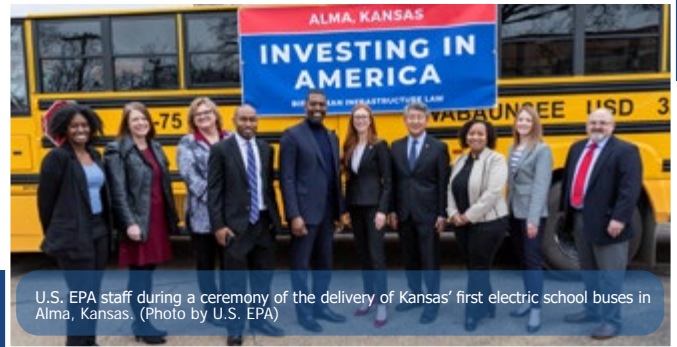


# Clean School Bus Program

Cleaner air. Reduced health risks, especially for children whose lungs are still developing. Reduced greenhouse gas emissions, which contribute to climate change. Cost savings from reduced maintenance and fuel costs. Increased community resiliency, as Vehicle-to-Grid capable buses can provide power to the grid or buildings during power shut-downs. These are just a few of the many reasons why EPA’s Clean School Bus program – funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – is providing \$5 billion over a five-year span (FY 2022-2026) to replace existing school buses with zero- and low-emission models.

To help reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions across the Midwest, EPA Region 7 received \$41.7 million in Clean School Bus funding for 51 of its school districts. Due to high demand in FY22, EPA increased its funding from the initially planned \$500 million to \$965 million for this most recent award period.

Region 7’s award recipient school districts were encouraged to advance with bus purchases and infrastructure development, with the hope of boosting demand for American-made batteries and vehicles, promoting domestic manufacturing and job

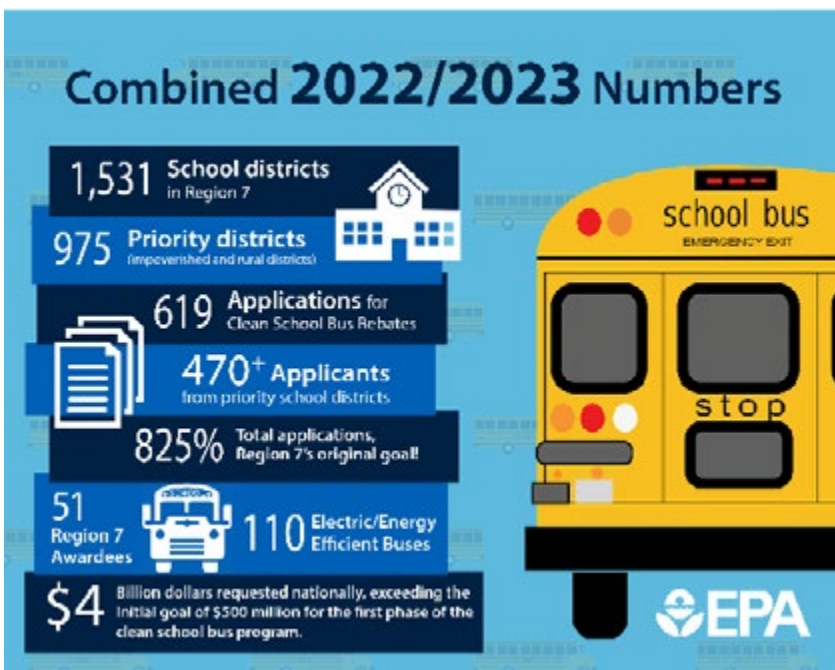


U.S. EPA staff during a ceremony of the delivery of Kansas’ first electric school buses in Alma, Kansas. (Photo by U.S. EPA)

creation. (Region 7’s awarded grantees are already in the process of supporting the purchase of 109 clean school buses.) EPA collaborated with the U.S. departments of Energy and Transportation to provide awardees with any technical support related to clean school bus or electric vehicle infrastructure.

With plans for future funding rounds and grant competitions, EPA plans to continue supporting clean school bus transitions, and has invited any Region 7 schools not selected in this round to apply during a future round of Clean School Bus rebate or grant funding.

Overall, this announcement marks a significant stride toward a more sustainable and healthy future for schoolchildren and communities across the Midwest, aligning with Region 7’s focus on improving the air quality and health of those who live in the Heartland.



**Did You Know?** - Region 7’s FY 2022 Clean School Bus Rebates were primarily awarded to low-income, rural, and tribal communities, with most applicants meeting the priority criteria aligned with President Biden’s Justice40 Initiative. This initiative aims to direct 40% of specific federal investment benefits to disadvantaged communities burdened by pollution, ensuring that funding for buses and electric vehicle infrastructure is accessible to the schools in the areas that need them the most.





Construction of an air monitoring station for the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska. (Photo by Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska – EPD Air)

## Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska Air Monitoring Project

Breathing fresh air into community health, on Dec. 5, 2022, EPA selected the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska for a \$266,064 grant for air pollution monitoring. This award was part of a broader initiative for FY23, funded by President Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act and American Rescue Plan, which allocated \$53.4 million to 132 air monitoring projects in 37 states.

“Funding for this air monitoring project for the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska will give the Winnebago people the data they need to monitor their local air quality and make the improvements needed to reduce air pollution in and around their communities,” said EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister. “Investing in communities such as the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska demonstrates the Biden-Harris administration’s commitment to addressing pollution in disproportionately impacted communities across our region.”

Region 7 is excited to play a continuing role in empowering communities to chart cleaner, healthier futures through enhanced air quality monitoring and management.

## Clean Air Enforcement Actions

Enforcing environmental laws is a central part of EPA’s Strategic Plan to protect human health and the environment. The Agency works to ensure compliance with environmental requirements through prevention campaigns and civil or criminal enforcement actions against violators of environmental laws, when warranted.

In FY 2023, EPA Region 7 actively enforced the Clean Air Act (CAA), focusing on both prevention and enforcement. The Region conducted public outreach to enhance understanding of EPA’s role protecting air quality (particularly Hazardous Air Pollutants and the National Ambient Air Quality Standards or NAAQS). Region 7 also engaged in national discussions on climate change and chemical accident prevention under CAA section 112(r).

Region 7’s Air and Radiation Division supported 12 Inflation Reduction Act-funded CAA programs, addressing regional impacts and collaborating with the Enforcement and Compliance Assurance Division on community-led environmental concerns, especially in fence line communities (population in close proximity to source of pollution).



## EPA Region 7 Encourages Radon Testing During National Radon Action Month

During Radon Action Month in January 2023, EPA Region 7 held six outreach events at Kansas City Public Library branches in Missouri to raise awareness of radon exposure and encourage residents to have their homes tested for the presence of radon.

Radon, a naturally occurring radioactive gas that cannot be seen or smelled, is the leading cause of lung cancer deaths among nonsmokers in the U.S. and is responsible for about 21,000 U.S. deaths each year. Jackson County, Missouri, is in EPA Radon Zone One, meaning homes in the county have the highest potential to test above the recommended radon level assigned by EPA.

Most homes throughout EPA Region 7 are located in areas designated as EPA Radon Zone One or Two, indicating high or moderate potential for elevated radon levels. EPA Region 7 encompasses Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and nine tribal nations.



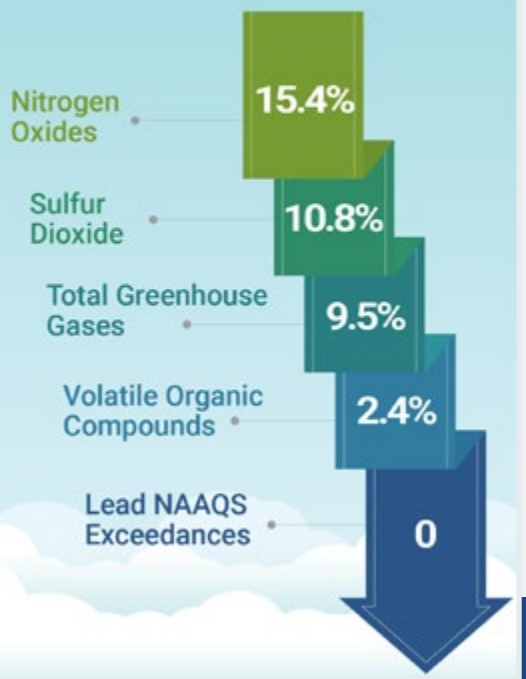
A map of EPA Radon Zones was developed in 1993 to identify areas of the U.S. with the greatest potential for elevated indoor radon levels, based on indoor radon measurement data, geology, aerial radioactivity, soil parameters, and foundation types.



To view a map of EPA's Radon Zones in your state, [visit EPA's website](#).

## NATIONAL AMBIENT AIR QUALITY STANDARDS

Region-Wide Emissions Of Key Pollutants Continue To Decrease



## Protecting Air Quality Standards

Through our Air and Radiation Division's work in implementing air quality standards and programs, air emissions in the region continued to decline over the last several years. Continued ARD activities related to National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) pollutants have significant co-benefits for our climate, as well as analytical work related to ozone. This past year, ARD successfully:

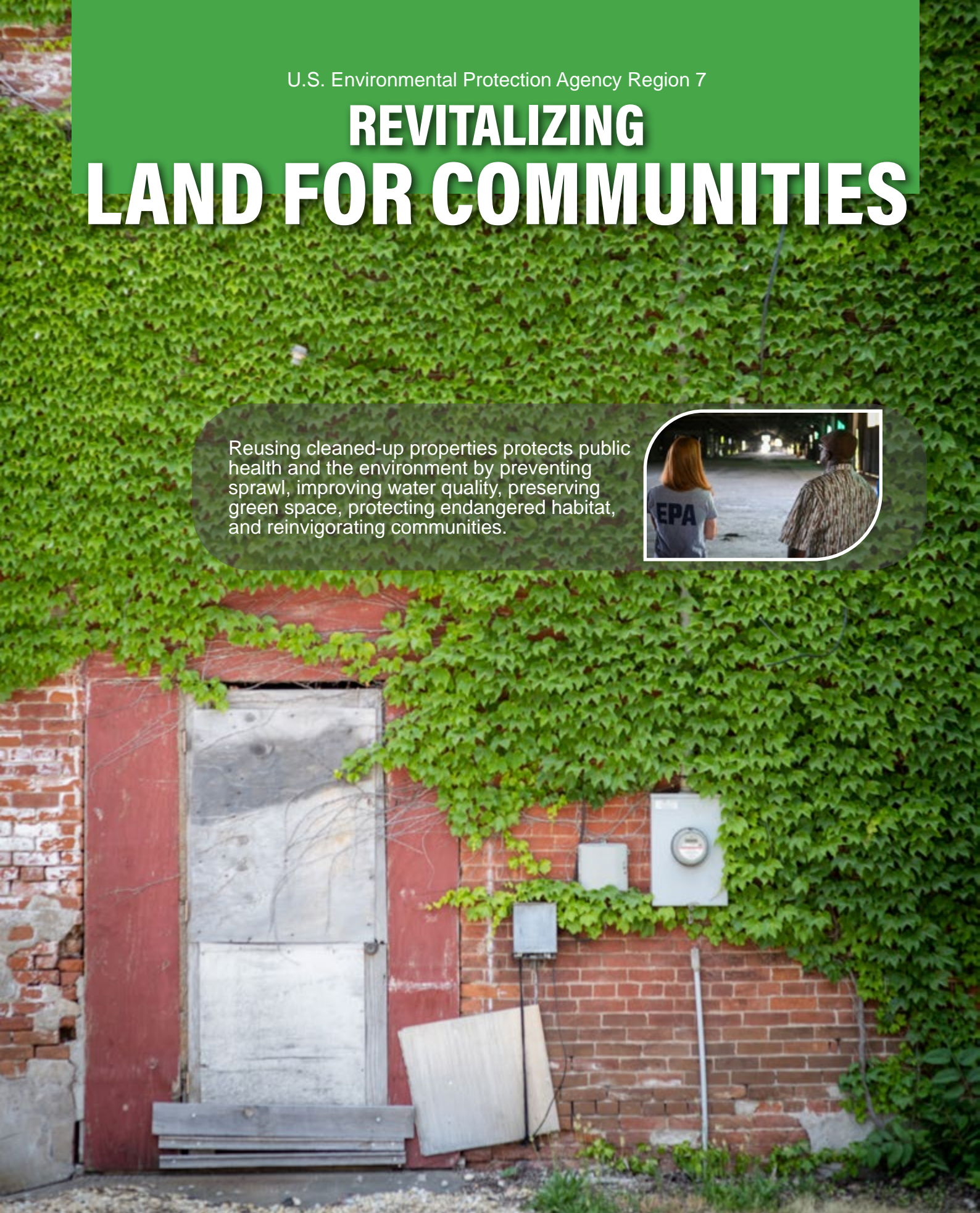
- Advanced the Region's climate adaptation efforts by working with state and tribal partners to assess ambient and indoor air quality challenges and developing recommendations to address the risk.
- Assisted with implementation of the federal landfill rule by reviewing design capacity and non-methane organic compound reports and developing responses to requests from landfills to use alternative monitoring and testing.
- Offered support to states on Clean Air Act section 111(d) plans for landfills and electric generation units. (These plans will assist in the reduction of greenhouse gases.)
- Stood up the Energy Star program in Region 7, which will result in further awareness of both the energy/cost savings and air pollution benefits associated with choosing energy-efficient appliances, etc.



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 7

# REVITALIZING LAND FOR COMMUNITIES

Reusing cleaned-up properties protects public health and the environment by preventing sprawl, improving water quality, preserving green space, protecting endangered habitat, and reinvigorating communities.





## Midwest Brownfields Roadtrip

In June, EPA Region 7 hit the road on a four-day “Investing in America” tour across Missouri and Iowa, celebrating Brownfields grant selections with communities. During the tour, Region 7 delivered nearly \$6 million in ceremonial checks to five communities and coalitions chosen to receive Brownfields grants.

The tour was a part of the “Investing in America” White House Initiative, with funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. With a total of \$1.5 billion in national funding from the law, EPA’s Brownfields program has expanded its ability to support environmental justice initiatives, spur economic revitalization, and create jobs by cleaning up contaminated, polluted, and hazardous brownfield properties.

This Region 7 tour made stops in Hannibal, Missouri, and the Iowa cities of Keokuk, Clinton and Waterloo. EPA selected these communities and organizations to receive funding to address and support the reuse of brownfield sites.

The tour was a successful initiative that caught the attention of EPA Headquarters and regions throughout the nation, sparking other regional administrators to follow suit and embark on tours of their own to celebrate their region’s Brownfields grant selections.



U.S. EPA Region 7 presents a \$500K check to the city of Clinton, Iowa, after its selection for a Brownfields Grant. (Photo by U.S. EPA)



U.S. EPA Region 7 Brownfields Program Manager Stan Walker speaks with participants at a ribbon cutting during a Brownfields ceremony at the Crystal Cold Storage facility in Waterloo, Iowa. (Photo by U.S. EPA)



U.S. EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister (center) receives a tour of the Elkem-Carbide facility in Keokuk, Iowa. (Photo by U.S. EPA)



## St. Louis Receives Brownfields Funding

EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister presented a \$500,000 ceremonial check on Aug. 24, 2023, to the Community Development Administration (CDA) of St. Louis as a Brownfields Assessment Grant selectee.

The city plans to utilize the Brownfields funding for community-wide actions, including Phase I and II environmental site assessments, developing site cleanup plans, and providing staff training.

The grant focuses on 11 St. Louis neighborhoods, which represent only 10% of the total geographic area of the city but account for approximately 53% of the total vacancies. Environmental site assessments will focus on vacant buildings, which depress home values and lead to further vacancy.

“Cleaning up contaminated properties helps protect families while creating new opportunities for our neighborhoods,” said Mayor Tishaura Jones. “St. Louis appreciates President Biden and the EPA for delivering these resources to our city.”



## Kansas Gets Cleanup Funding

In April, Region 7 joined representatives from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE), City of Wichita, and Chisholm Creek Utility Authority (CCUA) to celebrate historic investments at three Kansas Superfund sites, made possible with funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

- 57th and North Broadway Streets Site in Wichita
- Caney Residential Yards Site in Caney
- Plating Inc. Site in Great Bend

The 57th and North Broadway Streets Site borders Chisholm Creek and extends from the western edge of Park City through parts of northwestern Wichita. The primary contaminants of concern at the site are tetrachloroethene (PCE) and its breakdown components of trichloroethene, dichloroethene, vinyl chloride, and dioxane.

Components of the 2019 Record of Decision for the site include the installation of a groundwater extraction-and-treatment system to provide a hydraulic barrier preventing further migration of the contaminated groundwater plume and to restore the aquifer to its beneficial reuse as a drinking water source. EPA plans to operate the treatment system for one year after construction is complete. KDHE will then operate the treatment system for 10 years before transferring ownership to CCUA.



“We want to thank the Biden administration and the EPA for helping spur this cleanup,” said Wichita Mayor Brandon Whipple. “Today is a day to celebrate the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. These efforts create new opportunities for economic development and will benefit our residents now and in the future.”

A total of five Superfund sites in Kansas received a total of \$38 million in funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

## Technical Assistance to Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska and Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas

This year, Region 7 Superfund staff explored ways to develop standardized methodologies to expand engagement opportunities with our nine tribal partners. In honor of the National Historic Preservation Act, Region 7 is working more than ever to coordinate essential support for CERCLA activities in Indian country.

To engage in these partnerships, Superfund response teams provided technical assistance to two of Region 7’s tribal partners, the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska and the Kickapoo Tribe in Kansas. Superfund assisted Winnebago and Kickapoo Tribal partners with various CERCLA activities including sampling, removal, and disposal support.



## Region 7 Adds a New Site to the National Priorities List and funds 22 New Cleanup Projects

In 2023, EPA announced the second wave of approximately \$1 billion in funding from President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to start new cleanup projects at 22 Superfund sites – including the 57th and North Broadway Streets, Caney Residential Yards, and Plating Inc. sites in Kansas; and the Valley Park TCE Site in Valley Park, Missouri.

These sites are affected by tetrachloroethene (PCE) and its breakdown components, chromium, and lead contamination in the soil and groundwater, caused by various industrial practices previously conducted at their respective locations.

The PCE Carriage Cleaners Site in Bellevue, Nebraska, was added to the Superfund National Priorities List (NPL), following its listing in the Federal Register for a 60-day public comment period.

Before the site was vacated, historic dry-cleaning operations released tetrachloroethene (PCE) and its breakdown products and trichloroethene (TCE) into the soil and groundwater. Both PCE and TCE exceed the maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) in sub-slab soil gas and indoor air in residential and commercial properties.



The exterior of the Valley Park TCE Superfund Site in Valley Park, Missouri. (Photo by U.S. EPA)

The placement of the PCE Carriage Cleaners Site on the NPL makes it eligible to receive federal funding for long-term, permanent cleanup. Long-term remedial action is needed at the site to permanently clean up the contaminated soil and groundwater causing vapor intrusion.

In addition to funding cleanup construction work, this investment enables EPA to accelerate essential work needed to prepare sites for construction and ensure that communities are meaningfully involved in the cleanup process. In 2023, EPA more than doubled its spending for Superfund pre-construction activities like remedial investigations, feasibility studies, remedial designs, and community involvement.

**Out of the 22 sites to receive funding for new cleanup projects, 60% are in communities with the potential for environmental justice concerns, based on EJScreen data.**



Clean up at the Vienna Wells Superfund Site. (Photo credit Colin Willard, Maries County Advocate)

## Vienna Wells Superfund Site

Region 7 was able to use Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding to award a remedial action contract for over \$8 million to a Woman-Owned Small Business at the Vienna Wells Superfund Site in Vienna, Missouri.

In April, Region 7 completed Phase I remedial activities, including the demolition and disposal of the hat factory building and foundation. Phase II, which began later that month, consists of excavation and off-site disposal of contaminated soil that will be backfilled with clean soil.

The cleanups funded by BIL will allow EPA to excavate and dispose of approximately 30,000 cubic yards of PCE-contaminated soil from the site and to permanently remove PCE from Vienna's public drinking water supply.



## Cleanup Operations at Oil Discharge Scene Near Washington, Kansas

Mill Creek, impacted by the December 2022 oil spill near Washington, Kansas, is flowing naturally again after EPA Region 7 confirmed that oil removal efforts were complete during a final visual inspection of the creek on Oct. 13, 2023.

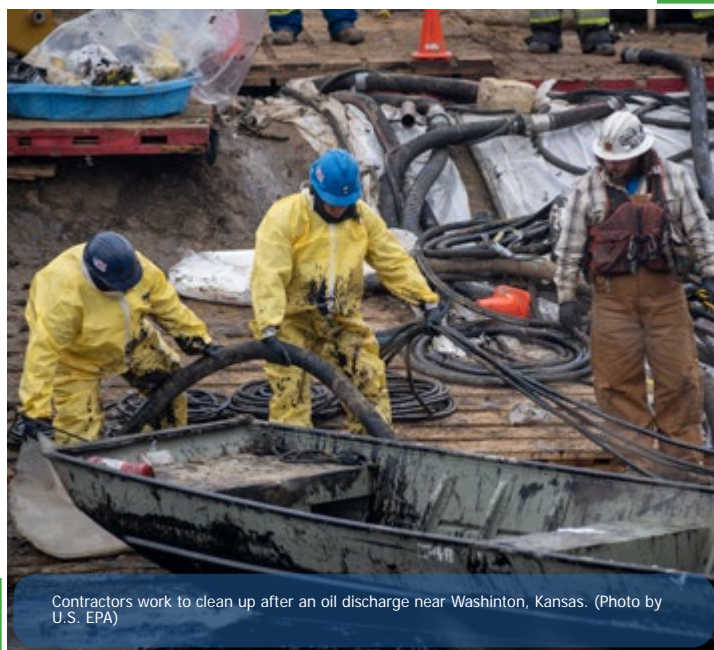
EPA and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) will continue to monitor the cleanup and restoration of the site and the impacted segments of Mill Creek. KDHE will conduct ongoing observations of the surface and groundwater. KDHE will also oversee the decommissioning of the water treatment facilities, monitor water quality, work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on restoration efforts, and work with the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks to evaluate the impacts on wildlife in the area.

EPA Region 7 on-scene coordinators (OSCs) were deployed to the scene after the initial National Response Center (NRC) report on Dec. 8, 2022, to oversee oil containment and recovery operations. During the bulk oil recovery phase, EPA staff performed recovery activities 24/7. This phase was completed on Jan. 29, 2023.

Although additional response-related tasks continued at the site – such as the disposal of oil-impacted soil and sediment and response-generated waste, and the restoration of lands impacted by the response – USACE authorized TC Energy to begin restoration work on May 11, 2023.

EPA staff worked over 6,000 hours and took over 83 trips to the scene. EPA personnel from Regions 3, 5, and 6, along with the U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Strike Team, supported Region 7.

In total, over 54 million gallons of contaminated surface water were treated and discharged back into Mill Creek. Over 650,000 gallons of oil were recovered, including product remaining in the pipeline following the rupture. Approximately 200,000 tons of oil-impacted soil, sediment, and debris were excavated and sent off-site for disposal.



Contractors work to clean up after an oil discharge near Washington, Kansas. (Photo by U.S. EPA)

“We are so pleased to see the progress on the restoration and recovery of Mill Creek and recognize that these are the combined efforts of hundreds of hard-working personnel,” said KDHE Secretary Janet Stanek. “I commend the KDHE team for its diligent and committed response to overseeing the remediation of the creek and surrounding area, and ensuring the future use of the water source.”

## Region 7 Response Efforts

The Region 7 Response Program conducted multiple major emergency response actions in 2023. While conducting responses, Region 7 was committed to supporting local teams, training and exercise events, and other national responses. A few notable examples include:

**East Palestine, Ohio Train Derailment:** a Norfolk Southern train derailment and hazardous material fire occurred in the town of East Palestine, Ohio. Region 7 deployed 15 staff members to fill key roles during the response.

**Typhoon Mawar, Guam, and Northern Mariana Islands:** Typhoon Mawar made landfall in Guam as a Category 4 typhoon. Region 7 supported the Region 9 response by providing two staff in support.

**Maui Wildfires, Lahaina, Hawaii:** Winds from Hurricane Dora spread wildfires rapidly across the island of Maui, Hawaii. Region 7 supported Region 9 with over a dozen staff.



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 7

# INVESTING IN REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS



We don't protect the environment on our own. We work with businesses, non profit organizations, and state and local governments through dozens of partnerships.





U.S. EPA Region 7 staff joined WSU officials and Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center (EJ TCTAC) partners to celebrate the opening of the Region 7 EJ TCTAC. (Photo by U.S. EPA)

## WSU's Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center

Communities with environmental justice concerns often experience increased barriers to accessing capacity-building support and technical assistance from federal partners. In response to this, on July 12, 2023, EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister, along with Wichita State University (WSU) officials and partners, inaugurated the first Region 7 Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center (EJ TCTAC) at the John Bardo Center on the WSU Innovation Campus.

This center, established to serve Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and nine tribal nations in EPA Region 7, is part of a broader network of 17 EJ TCTACs. These centers, jointly initiated by EPA and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), are beneficiaries of a \$177 million fund. Their role is to assist underserved and overburdened communities in accessing funds from President Biden's Investing in America Agenda, which includes substantial provisions for advancing environmental justice. Each center will receive at least \$10 million to aid communities with environmental justice issues in navigating federal grant processes.

The opening ceremony of the WSU Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Center featured discussions by EJ TCTAC environmental and energy justice partners, who outlined their planned services. These partners, including the Heartland Environmental Justice Center, Iowa Environmental Council, Center for Rural Affairs, and Metropolitan Congregations United, were chosen for their shared experiences with the target communities, positioning them to provide tailored technical assistance.

EJ TCTACs offer training and other assistance, including guidance on federal grant applications, proposal writing, grant management, community engagement, meeting facilitation, and language services for non-English speakers. They aim to not only remove barriers and improve access for communities facing environmental justice challenges, but also to create communication channels for direct access to resources and information.

In collaboration with DOE, the centers support community initiatives in clean energy transition, offering guidance on financing options, public-private partnerships, and opportunities for clean energy demonstration, deployment, workforce development, and outreach to further energy justice objectives.

The EJ TCTAC program is part of the Federal Interagency Thriving Communities Network and aligns with the Biden-Harris administration's Justice40 Initiative, which seeks to ensure that 40% of specific federal investment benefits reach disadvantaged communities. The new technical assistance centers will play a crucial role in helping communities with environmental justice concerns access President Biden's historic investments in America. These investments aim to tackle long-standing issues like disinvestment, legacy pollution, and infrastructure challenges, while building a clean energy economy to reduce energy costs, bolster energy security, and achieve climate goals.

## Promoting Student Career Opportunities and Environmental Outreach

In October 2022, EPA Region 7 renewed its formal partnership with Haskell Indian Nations University (Haskell) to promote environmental collaboration and career opportunities for Haskell students.

A five-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed at an event held on the Haskell campus in Lawrence, Kansas. EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister and Haskell Interim President Julia Good Fox signed the MOU. EPA Region 7 and Haskell signed their first MOU in 1999.

“This reaffirmation of the partnership between Haskell and the EPA will continue to provide excellent opportunities for our undergraduates,” Good Fox said. “After the uncertainty of the past couple of years, we are truly excited to honor the importance of the MOU. The projects and initiatives from our partnership clearly reverberate beyond the university campus.”

The MOU outlines eight areas for collaboration and partnership between EPA Region 7 and Haskell:

- Joint Research Projects – EPA Region 7 and Haskell will coordinate regularly to identify mutually beneficial research priorities.
- Faculty Research Participation – EPA Region 7 and Haskell will encourage and facilitate visits to each other’s facilities for research-related consultations, meetings, workshops, tours, and project participation. Adjunct faculty appointments may be offered to EPA Region 7 personnel, in conjunction with classes or research.
- Student Internships and Employment Preparation – EPA Region 7 will share information regarding programs designed for student employment, participation, and training. Haskell will facilitate the participation of students and staff in EPA internship outreach opportunities.



U.S. EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister (right) and Haskell Interim President Julia Good Fox sign a five-year Memorandum of Understanding. (Photo by U.S. EPA)

- Technical Assistance – EPA Region 7 and Haskell will consider opportunities to work together on research-related consultations, meetings, workshops, and seminars.
- Mini-Courses/Lectures/Seminars – EPA Region 7 and Haskell will consider opportunities to inform each other about training support, including research-related mini-courses, inspections/certification courses, lectures, and seminars.
- Outreach Program – EPA Region 7 will make best efforts to attend Haskell-sponsored career fairs and outreach events and will encourage Haskell students to apply for internship opportunities.
- Mentorship – EPA Region 7 may provide mentors for high-performing students identified by Haskell staff interested in a field of study related to EPA’s mission to protect human health and the environment.
- Environmental Student Initiatives – EPA Region 7 will support Haskell’s efforts to increase on-campus environmental awareness through activities such as helping educate Haskell students on sustainability, climate change, and environmental management systems.



## Region 7 Presents \$500K Check to City of Springfield, Missouri, for Brownfields Job Training

On Jan. 10, 2023, at the Missouri Job Center in Springfield, Missouri, EPA Region 7 presented a \$500,000 ceremonial check to the City of Springfield, Missouri, as a Brownfields Job Training Grant selectee.

With this funding, the city plans to train 112 students and place at least 70 of them in environmental jobs. The city's training program, Green for Greene, is tuition-free to accepted students and targets residents of Springfield who are unemployed or underemployed, veterans, and individuals with justice system involvement.

As part of the Investing in America Agenda, the Biden-Harris administration announced nearly \$7 million in funding to recruit and train workers for community revitalization projects nationwide in December 2022. EPA Region 7 was able to use \$1.5 million of that funding, made possible by President Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, for environmental job training programs in Missouri. These grants provided funding to recruit, train, and place workers for community revitalization and cleanup projects at brownfield sites.

The selected Missouri organizations were: Full Employment Council Inc. of Kansas City, Missouri; City of Springfield, Missouri; and St. Louis Community College, which serves the area including St. Louis City, St. Louis County, and portions of East St. Louis, Illinois. Each organization was selected to receive a \$500,000 job training grant.

The Brownfields Job Training program also advances environmental justice through President Biden's Justice40 Initiative, which aims to deliver at least 40% of the benefits of certain government programs to disadvantaged communities. Based on data from the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool, approximately 97% of the communities selected to receive funding from the Brownfields Job Training Grants announced in December 2022 have proposed projects in historically underserved areas.



U.S. EPA Region 7 staff and Springfield, Missouri, city leaders pose during a big check presentation ceremony. (Photo by U.S. EPA)

Individuals completing a job training program funded by EPA often overcome a variety of barriers to employment. Many trainees are from historically underserved neighborhoods or reside in areas that are overburdened by pollution.

Graduates of Brownfields Job Training programs learn valuable, sought-after skills and have the opportunity to earn a variety of certifications, ensuring that employment opportunities result in long-term environmental careers.



## Region 7 Attends Brownfields Job Training Graduation Ceremony at Ozark Correctional Center

EPA Region 7 Administrator Meg McCollister joined Springfield city leaders at a Green for Greene program graduation ceremony on March 10, 2023, at the Ozark Correctional Center near Springfield, Missouri. The program has trained 48 students, and the Ozark Correctional Center is the only state prison to offer it.

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EPA Region 7 protects human health and the environment in our nation's Heartland. Our ecosystems are numerous and the range is broad, encompassing the Sandhills of Nebraska, Flint Hills of Kansas, winding Missouri and Mississippi rivers, prairies and plains of Iowa, forests and delta of Missouri, and an abundance of agricultural lands throughout our region.

11201 Renner Boulevard, Lenexa, KS 66219 | 800-223-0425 | [www.epa.gov/region7](http://www.epa.gov/region7)

