

September 14, 2007

Lisa P. Jackson, Commissioner  
Department of Environmental Protection  
401 East State Street  
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Commissioner Jackson:

It has just come to my attention that the Department is prepared to issue a Request for Proposals or other bidding documents concerning contracting out services for private sector pollution geologists to support the Department's Site Remediation Program.

This major privatization initiative would reverse a longstanding policy of the Department's conduct of geological science and oversight of groundwater resources.

Privatization of geological support functions would undermine scientific integrity and the public's trust and confidence in the Department's decisions. It would weaken oversight and cleanup of toxic sites and protection of groundwater resources; create conflicts of interest; erode the polluter pays principle; and increase taxpayer costs.

This major policy shift is being developed and implemented unilaterally in the absence of any public notice, public involvement, or legislative consultation.

New Jersey Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) is strongly opposed to any privatization of essential scientific and technical services that support protection of our groundwater resources, which serve as water supply for approximately half the residents of the State.

Today I filed an OPRA request for all public documents related to this privatization initiative.

According to an August meeting of selected Site Remediation stakeholders from industry and community groups on "Addressing Backlogs," the DEP summary admits that "use of in-house contractors [was] not discussed in detail" yet that option is appears to have been selected despite a pledge to keep stakeholders involved.

I urge you to impose a moratorium on any final actions with respect to this initiative.

If the Department wishes to pursue an initiative to privatize the science of groundwater protection, the Department should do so openly, with authorization of the Legislature,

and with the full knowledge support of the people of New Jersey, who rely on safe and clean water.

Sincerely,

Bill Wolfe, Director  
New Jersey PEER