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Contacts: Penny Newman 951-892-4311 Bradley Angel 415- 722-5270
Ingrid Brostrom 510-717-8482

Available in person at 10:00am at Byron Sher Hearing Room, CalEPA
Headquarters Building 1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

Environmental Justice Groups Reveal DTSC Staffers' Racist Emails Demand Governor and Legislature Investigation

After years of complaints from Communities of Color and now revelation of the engrained Racial Bias within the staff- Groups demand Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) either be reformed from the ground up or Shut Down!

Sacramento, CA—Environmental Justice advocates from around the state today demanded that Governor Jerry Brown and state legislators investigate and eliminate racial bias in decision-making by the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) as reflected in racist emails written by DTSC staffers. Speaking at the Independent Review Committee established by the legislature to review the department and make recommendations, community residents and advocates unveiled racist emails and demanded an investigation. Phrases like “crackho hooker,” “Chop-chop Hop Sing,” and “Mommy must have had a way too many painkillers when she named this guy”, are scattered throughout them. Toxic cleanup sites and hazardous waste facilities are overwhelmingly located in poorer, predominantly non-white communities across the state.

“We, the undersigned organizations and individuals, demand the Governor’s and the Legislature’s immediate attention to the use of government computers and email systems within the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) to transmit overtly racist emails, specifically targeting Asians, Latinos, and African Americans,” the groups wrote in a letter. “As we understand the facts, these emails were found on State computers, sent during working hours, while staff were purported to be conducting state business. After countless meetings and hearings before the DTSC, our organizations have lost faith in the governmental agency tasked with protecting our most vulnerable residents from toxic hazards, residents who predominantly are Asian, Latino, and African American. “

“As organizations that work directly with the Department and the residents it is tasked with protecting, it pains us to see what it has become –an agency steeped in implicit and explicit racial bias. Since discovering the racist emails, it pains us further still that DTSC has worked harder to cover it up than correct it. After years of mismanagement, we can no longer simply stand by and wait for the agency to fix itself. For that reason, we are calling on you, Governor Brown, and on Legislative leadership to step in and oversee a process to root out racial bias within California agencies, using DTSC as the benchmark for establishing a sound and transparent process to identify, disclose, and address inappropriate prejudice in state employees.”

The emails came to light during a DTSC review of documents responsive to a Public Records Act request by CCAEJ. The review “turned up emails of a very racist nature – jokes, cartoons, comments, and derogatory remarks against Asians, Latinos and African Americans,” the letter said. When staff brought the emails to DTSC Director Barbara Lee, she chose to handle the situation as “a personnel issue” sealing the public records that should be immediately released from outside review.

For years, these groups have pressed for thorough cleanups based on cumulative exposure to toxics at dirty sites, and tough fines and denial of permits for serial polluters. They have said that the DTSC prefers to let facilities keep operating at any cost.

“We are concerned that thousands of families across this state may be in harm’s way or forced to live in dangerous situations due in part to the racist attitudes, judgment and actions of DTSC staff,” the groups wrote. “If staff are influenced by a belief that there are some people more worth fighting for than others, the reforms needed at the Department go much further and deeper than we previously anticipated. It is clear to us that the Governor and the Legislature must now step in to reform the agency or close it down.”

The groups wrote that racial bias extends even to the Governor’s office where a staffer said that environmental agencies are “all like that” when it comes to racial bias. “For people within government to know this, and to perpetuate that culture by simply dismissing such egregious activity is even more appalling,” the letter said.

For more on the DTSC and its treatment of environmental justice communities, see: [PEOPLE’S SENATE REPORT](#) [GOLDEN WASTELAND](#)