

EPA Regional Chief Resigns After Dispute

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The head of the Environmental Protection Agency's Midwest office in Chicago says she resigned in a dispute with the agency's leadership over enforcement actions involving Dow Chemical Co.

The departure of Mary Gade is the latest in a series of unusually public conflicts between the EPA's chief, Stephen Johnson, and his subordinates, and comes at a time when Mr. Johnson is under criticism from congressional Democrats for some of his decisions.

- The News: The head of the EPA's Midwest office resigned.
- The Background: She had clashed with agency leaders over enforcement actions involving Dow Chemical.
- River Cleanup: The ex-official said the dispute involved her office's efforts to get the company to clean up dioxin contamination.

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal, Ms. Gade, a former corporate attorney who advised the Bush presidential campaign in 2000 on environmental matters and who was appointed to her post less than two years ago, said senior agency officials on Thursday told her to quit or be fired.

Ms. Gade linked the agency's action to her office's efforts to press Dow Chemical to clean up a Michigan river system that is near a Dow chemical-manufacturing plant and that is contaminated with dioxin as a result of past waste-disposal practices, emissions and incineration at the plant.

"It's related to the ongoing discussion between me, my region and [EPA] headquarters about Dow," Ms. Gade said. She declined to specify what she and her superiors had disagreed about but added that ordinary citizens "should be concerned" because "this may be some of the worst dioxin contamination" in the U.S.

"It's important we make sure the company steps up to the plate and meets its obligations under the law," Ms. Gade said. "It would be great if I could stay and fight this battle, but it reached the point where I had to resign."

An EPA spokesman confirmed Ms. Gade had been placed on administrative leave and that she has submitted her resignation. He declined to respond to her other comments, or to specify why she had

been placed on administrative leave. The EPA's regional administrator in Chicago oversees federal environmental programs in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin.

John Musser, a Dow Chemical spokesman, said the company never asked the EPA to relieve Ms. Gade from her duties. He added that the company found out about her placement on leave from the media. He said the company doesn't know what led the EPA to do that.

Ms. Gade's resignation was reported on the Chicago Tribune's Web site late Thursday.

In January, Ms. Gade's office announced that it had stopped negotiations with Dow Chemical aimed at reaching a settlement over cleanup actions related to dioxin contamination in the Tittabawassee River system. The agency said that "key issues that are paramount for protecting human health and the environment remain unresolved," and quoted Ms. Gade as saying she was "extremely disappointed with" the outcome of the talks. In the interview, she declined to specify what her office and Dow had disagreed about.

Dow's Mr. Musser said that Ms. Gade's office asked Dow "to do things that were not consistent with national guidelines or national policy." He declined to elaborate, saying discussions with the EPA were confidential.

After the negotiations fell through, Dow met with EPA officials in Washington to discuss what the company perceived as unfair treatment by the local office, said Mr. Musser. Ms. Gade was present at the meeting, Mr. Musser added.

Ms. Gade's resignation comes as Mr. Johnson is under fire from congressional Democrats for overruling his staff in disputes affecting major industries.

In December, against the recommendations of many senior EPA staffers, Mr. Johnson denied California permission to regulate greenhouse-gas emissions from automobiles. Mr. Johnson also has resisted pressure from Democrats and many states to formally declare greenhouse-gas emissions a threat to public welfare -- the legal prerequisite to regulating them -- despite a tentative conclusion from agency staffers last year that they do.

Because a decision to regulate greenhouse-gas emissions from vehicles could trigger similar regulations affecting a range of other industries, Mr. Johnson has called for first soliciting public comment on the idea.

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