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18TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT
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The Honorable Lee Zeldin, Administrator
Regional Administrator Scott Mason IV
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Zeldin,

I am the new Member of Congress representing Texas's 18th Congressional District, which encompasses the Fifth Ward, Kashmere Gardens, and adjacent communities in Houston. These are the communities living near the former Houston Wood Preserving Works (HWPW) site. In 2023, following a Notice of Intent to Sue filed by Harris County, the City of Houston, and a nonprofit group, the EPA entered into an Administrative Settlement Agreement and Order on Consent (ASAOC) with the site's operator, Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR).

The 18th Congressional District office was vacant for nearly a year, as my predecessor passed in March 2025, and I was not sworn in until earlier this year. We are now working to address the community's longstanding concerns about this site.

The saga of this site has been long and frustrating for residents. For years, community members raised alarms about elevated rates of cancer and illness in these neighborhoods, but meaningful government action was slow to come. In 2019, the Texas Department of State Health Services formally confirmed what residents had long suspected, finding significantly higher than expected rates of certain cancers in census tracts surrounding the HWPW site. That same year, when Texas's environmental regulatory agency was poised to renew a UPRR permit that included a proposed cleanup plan the community found wholly inadequate, community members and local officials challenged the plan and pushed for a more rigorous process. Ultimately, in 2022, EPA came to the table after the Notice of Intent to Sue under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. That effort produced the 2023 ASAOC, authorized under CERCLA, which is the legal foundation for everything that has happened at this site since, including a binding agreement to conduct a Removal Site Evaluation (RSE).

My constituents have been waiting a very long time. The ASAOC requires the investigation and evaluation of contamination at this site. These communities have serious, longstanding questions about the testing that has been conducted, including how decisions were made about where to test, how deep to test, which contaminants to include, and how the testing zones were defined and bounded. They also have questions about how EPA has communicated with them throughout this process and what recourse exists

when they feel their concerns have not been heard. Beyond those questions about process, my understanding is EPA has stated to community members that the relevant final report would be completed by late 2025 or early 2026. It has not been released. My constituents want to know what the results mean for their health and their families, and they deserve an answer.

I was personally engaged on this issue for years in my prior role as Harris County Attorney. I was among those who initiated the legal process that helped bring EPA to the table and led directly to the ASAOC. I am not coming to this matter fresh. I am picking up where prior leadership left off, with the same commitment to these communities and the same expectation that the federal government will fulfill its obligations under the legal agreement it entered into.

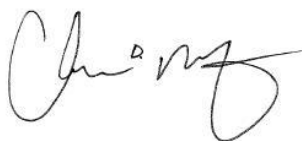
Given the significance of this matter and the potential implications of the forthcoming RSE findings, it is critical that my office receive a comprehensive briefing on the current status. It is critical that we understand:

1. The current status and anticipated release timeline for the final RSE report, including whether any extension requests have been made by UPRR under the terms of the ASAOC
2. The methodology used in sampling, including decisions regarding depth, location, and analytes;
3. The rationale for any recent additional testing conducted at residential properties;
4. EPA's plan for communicating findings to the community in a clear, accessible, and timely manner;
5. Any preliminary conclusions or considerations regarding potential risks to human health and next steps.
6. In advance of this meeting, I also request access to all relevant materials, including but not limited to interim data summaries, quality assurance documentation, and any draft or pre-decisional materials related to the RSE to the extent permissible.

When the report is released, residents in these communities will need the findings explained in clear and understandable language, through channels that actually reach them. Community members on EPA's Community Advisory Group have raised this concern directly and repeatedly. I want to know what EPA intends to do to meet that obligation.

I look forward to your prompt response and to scheduling a meeting at your earliest availability.

Sincerely,



Christian D. Menefee
Member of Congress
Texas's 18th Congressional District

Cc; Regional Administrator Scott Mason IV