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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4329

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CHIEF DEPUTY WHIP
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COMMITTEE ON NATURAL
RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,
FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS,
OCEANS AND WILDLIFE

Gina McCarthy
Assistant Administrator
Office of Air and Radiation
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Assistant Administrator McCarthy:

Thank you for your ongoing efforts to make the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Energy Star program such a success in improving the energy efficiency of American homes. Our homes account for one quarter of our national energy demand and improving home energy efficiency, especially in heating and cooling, is a critical component in reducing our nation's greenhouse gas emissions.

I am writing to express my concern that improving home energy efficiency could come at the price of increased potential for indoor air pollution. Energy efficient homes are designed and built to be much tighter to keep conditioned air in and unconditioned air out. Unfortunately, this could also allow formaldehyde and other chemicals emitted by building materials like insulation to build up indoors to potentially unhealthy levels. The EPA should definitely continue its home energy efficiency efforts but do so in a manner that will not sacrifice home indoor air quality.

Perhaps the best way to address potential indoor air quality issues is through pollution prevention. Most would agree that it is easier to prevent pollution than to allow it indoors, and then have to implement additional steps to clean the air. What's more, the Pollution Prevention Act of 1990 confirmed pollution prevention as an important national policy.

Therefore, I suggest that the EPA Indoor airPlus program as well as the Home Performance with Energy Star program fully implement principles of pollution prevention by requiring building materials, including insulation, to be made without formaldehyde and other potentially harmful chemicals.

The federal government should encourage the use of safer materials that are now widely available across the country from multiple manufacturers. Energy Star homes should be more energy efficient as well as healthier and safer for our families. Requiring the Energy Star program to look past pollution causing materials that use formaldehyde would also help prevent pollution at the very factories making the building materials.

Thank you for your hard work to improve pollution prevention efforts at the EPA. I look forward to hearing from the EPA on this issue. You may contact Steve Plevniak, Senior Legislative Assistant, with my office at (202) 225-4431 should you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Diana DeGette
Member of Congress