



September 6, 2019

VIA ONLINE PORTAL

National FOIA Office  
Office of the General Counsel  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW (2822T)  
Washington, DC 20460  
Via FOIA Online

**Re: Freedom of Information Act Request**

Dear FOIA Officer:

Pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. § 552, and the implementing regulations of your agency, American Oversight makes the following request for records.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been considering changes to the regulations that implement the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) created by the Clean Water Act (CWA).<sup>1</sup> In response to excess precipitation, a Publicly Owned Treatment Work (POTW) would be able to omit biological treatment for certain wastewater, then recombine it with fully treated sewage before discharging it into a waterway, such as a river or lake.<sup>2</sup> Experts have expressed concerns that this process potentially releases pathogens, which could spread diseases among human communities, and other harmful substances, which could disrupt broader ecological communities.<sup>3</sup>

American Oversight seeks records with the potential to shed light on whether and to what extent this intended policy change was influenced by outside groups.

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<sup>1</sup> Public Listening Session: Stakeholder Input on Peak Flows Management, 83 Fed. Reg. 44,623 (Aug. 31, 2018), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/08/31/2018-19016/public-listening-session-stakeholder-input-on-peak-flows-management>.

<sup>2</sup> Emily Atkin, *Déjà Poo All Over Again*, NEW REPUBLIC, Apr. 19, 2018, <https://newrepublic.com/article/148032/deja-poo-epa-considers-rule-blending-sewage>.

<sup>3</sup> Claudia Copeland, *EPA's Proposed Policy on Wastewater Blending: Background and Issues*, CONG. RESEARCH SERV. (Feb. 2005), available at [https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20050214\\_RL32384\\_fca54e2b800c10595f4871eb153c10709be66c0e.pdf](https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20050214_RL32384_fca54e2b800c10595f4871eb153c10709be66c0e.pdf).



## Requested Records

American Oversight requests that the EPA produce the following records within twenty business days:

All email communications (including email messages, email attachments, calendar invitations, and calendar invitation attachments) between (1) any of the specified EPA officials and (2) any of the specified external entities—including communications with any email address ending in the domain names identified—regarding the process of wastewater blending.

### EPA Officials:

1. Andrew Wheeler, Administrator, and anyone communicating on his behalf, such as an assistant or scheduler
2. Scott Pruitt, Former Administrator, and anyone communicating on his behalf, such as an executive or special assistant, or scheduler
3. Henry Darwin, Acting Deputy Administrator
4. Matthew Z. Leopold, General Counsel
5. Ryan Jackson, Chief of Staff
6. Kevin DeBell, Acting Deputy Chief of Staff
7. Brittany Bolen, Associate Administrator, Office of Policy
8. Dave Ross, Assistant Administrator, Office of Water
9. Dennis Lee Forsgren, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Water
10. Anna Wildeman, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Water
11. Benita Best-Wong, Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator, Office of Water
12. Owen McDonough, Senior Science Advisor, Office of Water
13. Andrew Sawyers, Director, Office of Wastewater Management
14. Martha Shimkin, Acting Deputy Director, Office of Wastewater Management
15. Joseph Brazauskas, Acting Associate Administrator, Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations
16. Tom Brennan, Acting Director of the Science Advisory Board Staff Office
17. Anyone serving in the role of White House Liaison or White House Advisor (including deputies)

### External Entities:

1. National Association of Counties (naco.org)
2. National League of Cities (nlc.org)
3. United States Conference of Mayors (usmayors.org)
4. National Tribal Water Council
5. Association of Clean Water Administrators (acwa-us.org)
6. Association of Metropolitan Water Agencies (amwa.net)
7. Water Environment Federation (wef.org)
8. Municipal Blending Group

9. Wet Weather Partnership (wetweatherpartnership.org)
10. Center for Regulatory Reasonableness  
(centerforregulatoryreasonableness.org)
11. Water and Wastewater Equipment Manufacturers Association  
(wwema.org)
12. National Utility Contractors Association (nuca.com)
13. American Water Works Company (amwater.com)
14. Black and Veatch (bv.com)
15. Brown and Caldwell (brownandcaldwell.com)
16. Dow Chemical Company (dow.com)
17. E. I. du Pont de Nemours and Company (dupont.com)
18. Ecology, Incorporated (usecology.com)
19. Evoqua Water Technologies Corporation (evoqua.com)
20. Jacobs Engineering (jacobs.com)
21. Veolia Environnement (veolia.com)
22. WesTech Engineering, Incorporated (westech-inc.com)
23. Xylem, Incorporated (xylem.com)
24. Alignment Government Strategies (align-strategies.com)
25. Barnes and Thornburg (btlaw.com)
26. Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck (bhfs.com)
27. Cardinal Point Partners (cardinalpoint.com)
28. ENS Resources (ensresources.com)
29. Greenfield Government Strategies
30. Holland and Knight (hklaw.com)
31. K&L Gates (klgates.com)
32. Rasky Partners (rasky.com)
33. SBL Strategies (sblstrategies.com)
34. Squire Patton Boggs (squirepattonboggs.com)
35. Van Scoyoc Associates (vsadc.com)
36. Whitmer and Worrall (whitmerworrall.com)

American Oversight believes that records containing the terms below are likely to be responsive records, and American Oversight requests that the EPA, at a minimum, employ these search terms to identify responsive records:

- i. “Wastewater Blending”
- ii. “Wet Weather Flow”
- iii. “Peak Flow”
- iv. “Sewer Overflow”
- v. “National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System”
- vi. “NPDES”

American Oversight requests that the EPA provide all responsive records from January 1, 2018, through the date of the search.

## Fee Waiver Request

In accordance with 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii) and your agency's regulations, American Oversight requests a waiver of fees associated with processing this request for records. The subject of this request concerns the operations of the federal government, and the disclosures will likely contribute to a better understanding of relevant government procedures by the general public in a significant way. Moreover, the request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.

American Oversight requests a waiver of fees because disclosure of the requested information is "in the public interest because it is likely to contribute significantly to public understanding of operations or activities of the government."<sup>4</sup> The public has a significant interest in the contents of the effluent discharged into waterways, which is enormously impactful on public health. Records with the potential to shed light on this matter would contribute significantly to public understanding of operations of the federal government, including the treatment of wastewater blending practices at the EPA. American Oversight is committed to transparency and makes the responses agencies provide to FOIA requests publicly available, and the public's understanding of the government's activities would be enhanced through American Oversight's analysis and publication of these records.

This request is primarily and fundamentally for non-commercial purposes.<sup>5</sup> As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, American Oversight does not have a commercial purpose and the release of the information requested is not in American Oversight's financial interest. American Oversight's mission is to promote transparency in government, to educate the public about government activities, and to ensure the accountability of government officials. American Oversight uses the information gathered, and its analysis of it, to educate the public through reports, press releases, or other media. American Oversight also makes materials it gathers available on its public website and promotes their availability on social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter.<sup>6</sup>

American Oversight has also demonstrated its commitment to the public disclosure of documents and creation of editorial content through numerous substantive analyses posted to its website.<sup>7</sup> Examples reflecting this commitment to the public disclosure of documents and the creation of editorial content include the posting of records related to an ethics waiver received by a senior Department of Justice attorney and an analysis of

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<sup>4</sup> 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

<sup>5</sup> See 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(A)(iii).

<sup>6</sup> American Oversight currently has approximately 12,250 page likes on Facebook and 54,500 followers on Twitter. American Oversight, FACEBOOK, <https://www.facebook.com/weareoversight/> (last visited Sept. 5, 2019); American Oversight (@weareoversight), TWITTER, <https://twitter.com/weareoversight> (last visited Sept. 5, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> News, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/blog>.

what those records demonstrated regarding the Department’s process for issuing such waivers;<sup>8</sup> posting records received as part of American Oversight’s “Audit the Wall” project to gather and analyze information related to the administration’s proposed construction of a barrier along the U.S.-Mexico border, and analyses of what those records reveal;<sup>9</sup> posting records regarding potential self-dealing at the Department of Housing & Urban Development and related analysis;<sup>10</sup> posting records and analysis relating to the federal government’s efforts to sell nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia;<sup>11</sup> and posting records and analysis regarding the Department of Justice’s decision in response to demands from Congress to direct a U.S. Attorney to undertake a wide-ranging review and make recommendations regarding criminal investigations relating to the President’s political opponents and allegations of misconduct by the Department of Justice itself and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, American Oversight qualifies for a fee waiver.

### **Guidance Regarding the Search & Processing of Requested Records**

In connection with its request for records, American Oversight provides the following guidance regarding the scope of the records sought and the search and processing of records:

- Please search all locations and systems likely to have responsive records, regardless of format, medium, or physical characteristics.
- Our request for records includes any attachments to those records or other materials enclosed with those records when they were previously transmitted. To

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<sup>8</sup> *DOJ Records Relating to Solicitor General Noel Francisco’s Recusal*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/document/doj-civil-division-response-noel-francisco-compliance>; *Francisco & the Travel Ban: What We Learned from the DOJ Documents*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/francisco-the-travel-ban-what-we-learned-from-the-doj-documents>.

<sup>9</sup> *See generally Audit the Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigation/audit-the-wall>; *see, e.g., Border Wall Investigation Report: No Plans, No Funding, No Timeline, No Wall*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/border-wall-investigation-report-no-plans-no-funding-no-timeline-no-wall>.

<sup>10</sup> *Documents Reveal Ben Carson Jr.’s Attempts to Use His Influence at HUD to Help His Business*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/documents-reveal-ben-carson-jr-s-attempts-to-use-his-influence-at-hud-to-help-his-business>.

<sup>11</sup> *Investigating the Trump Administration’s Efforts to Sell Nuclear Technology to Saudi Arabia*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/investigating-the-trump-administrations-efforts-to-sell-nuclear-technology-to-saudi-arabia>.

<sup>12</sup> *Sessions’ Letter Shows DOJ Acted on Trump’s Authoritarian Demand to Investigate Clinton*, AMERICAN OVERSIGHT, <https://www.americanoversight.org/sessions-letter>.

the extent that an email is responsive to our request, our request includes all prior messages sent or received in that email chain, as well as any attachments to the email.

- Please search all relevant records or systems containing records regarding agency business. Do not exclude records regarding agency business contained in files, email accounts, or devices in the personal custody of your officials, such as personal email accounts or text messages. Records of official business conducted using unofficial systems or stored outside of official files are subject to the Federal Records Act and FOIA.<sup>13</sup> It is not adequate to rely on policies and procedures that require officials to move such information to official systems within a certain period of time; American Oversight has a right to records contained in those files even if material has not yet been moved to official systems or if officials have, by intent or through negligence, failed to meet their obligations.<sup>14</sup>
- Please use all tools available to your agency to conduct a complete and efficient search for potentially responsive records. Agencies are subject to government-wide requirements to manage agency information electronically,<sup>15</sup> and many agencies have adopted the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Capstone program, or similar policies. These systems provide options for searching emails and other electronic records in a manner that is reasonably likely to be more complete than just searching individual custodian files. For example, a custodian may have deleted a responsive email from his or her email program, but your agency’s archiving tools may capture that email under Capstone. At the same time, custodian searches are still necessary; agencies may not have direct access to files stored in .PST files, outside of network drives, in paper format, or in personal email accounts.
- In the event some portions of the requested records are properly exempt from disclosure, please disclose any reasonably segregable non-exempt portions of the requested records. If a request is denied in whole, please state specifically why it is not reasonable to segregate portions of the record for release.

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<sup>13</sup> See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, 827 F.3d 145, 149–50 (D.C. Cir. 2016); cf. *Judicial Watch, Inc. v. Kerry*, 844 F.3d 952, 955–56 (D.C. Cir. 2016).

<sup>14</sup> See *Competitive Enter. Inst. v. Office of Sci. & Tech. Policy*, No. 14-cv-765, slip op. at 8 (D.D.C. Dec. 12, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Presidential Memorandum—Managing Government Records, 76 Fed. Reg. 75,423 (Nov. 28, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/28/presidential-memorandum-managing-government-records>; Office of Mgmt. & Budget, Exec. Office of the President, Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments & Independent Agencies, “Managing Government Records Directive,” M-12-18 (Aug. 24, 2012), <https://www.archives.gov/files/records-mgmt/m-12-18.pdf>.

- Please take appropriate steps to ensure that records responsive to this request are not deleted by the agency before the completion of processing for this request. If records potentially responsive to this request are likely to be located on systems where they are subject to potential deletion, including on a scheduled basis, please take steps to prevent that deletion, including, as appropriate, by instituting a litigation hold on those records.

## Conclusion

If you have any questions regarding how to construe this request for records or believe that further discussions regarding search and processing would facilitate a more efficient production of records of interest to American Oversight, please do not hesitate to contact American Oversight to discuss this request. American Oversight welcomes an opportunity to discuss its request with you before you undertake your search or incur search or duplication costs. By working together at the outset, American Oversight and your agency can decrease the likelihood of costly and time-consuming litigation in the future.

Where possible, please provide responsive material in an electronic format by email. Alternatively, please provide responsive material in native format or in PDF format on a USB drive. Please send any responsive material being sent by mail to American Oversight, 1030 15th Street NW, Suite B255, Washington, DC 20005. If it will accelerate release of responsive records to American Oversight, please also provide responsive material on a rolling basis.

We share a common mission to promote transparency in government. American Oversight looks forward to working with your agency on this request. If you do not understand any part of this request, please contact Hart Wood at [foia@americanoversight.org](mailto:foia@americanoversight.org) or 202.873.1743. Also, if American Oversight's request for a fee waiver is not granted in full, please contact us immediately upon making such a determination.

Sincerely,



Austin R. Evers  
Executive Director  
American Oversight