

**BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE OF ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT**

**Hearing Entitled “Protecting Taxpayers and Ensuring Accountability: Faster Superfund
Cleanups for Healthier Communities”**

June 10, 2014

**TESTIMONY OF SCOTT A. THOMPSON
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Good afternoon Chairman Booker, Ranking Member Inhofe, and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak at today’s hearing. My name is Scott Thompson and I serve as the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality.

My personal involvement with Superfund sites dates back to 1984 when I was pulling samples across Oklahoma at various sites being evaluated for the Superfund Program.

I would like to begin by thanking EPA Administrator McCarthy for fostering a cooperative atmosphere between EPA headquarters, the various EPA Regional Offices, and the respective state environmental agencies.

One program that demonstrates the success of partnerships between EPA, States, and local stakeholders is the Brownfields Program. Information previously obtained through the Superfund Site Assessment Program on various Oklahoma sites has allowed for expedited redevelopment of many properties. Additionally, liability releases through the Brownfields Program have provided the necessary assurances to entice developers to invest in the community and spark more urban renewal.

Two examples of successful, award winning projects include: (1) Guthrie Green Project in Tulsa, which was funded by the non-profit George Kaiser Family Foundation, and was the

recipient of the 2013 Brownfields Renewal Award; (2) The Devon Energy Center in Oklahoma City which received the 2012 EPA Region 6 Phoenix Award as well as the 2012 National Phoenix Award. Both sites are now vibrant recreational gathering places that have sparked economic and cultural rejuvenation in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. These major successes were only possible through the teamwork of our many dedicated partners.

The importance of public funding for the Brownfields Program cannot be overstated. Its greatest impact is demonstrated by removing perceived and real environmental obstacles to economic redevelopment, and encourages private development. The Program demonstrates that modest public investment can lead to extraordinary growth that far exceeds the original scope of a Brownfields Project. Due to the major impacts that Brownfields funding has had in Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality strongly supports the reauthorization of the Brownfields Program.

The Superfund process, while noble in its goals is not without its drawbacks. The time it takes to successfully complete the process can put a strain on resources, communities, and on human health and the environment.

Through our lengthy experience with Superfund Sites, The Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality strongly believes that the best way to maintain cost effectiveness and to adequately protect human health and the environment is to have responsible government oversight of contractors. One recommendation for improving the Superfund Remedial Program is to use the Superfund Emergency Response Program as the model. On-Scene Coordinators (OSCs) function as on-site construction and contract managers in a way that is substantially different than some Remedial Project Managers (RPMs). In my experience, RPMs are too often removed from the on-site remedial actions. Cost control on remedial projects is at times

managed in an inefficient way in comparison to Removal Actions. Remedial Actions on National Priorities List (NPL) sites would benefit if the RPM model was modified to mirror the OSC model.

Fostering innovative partnerships is another way to ensure cost efficiencies and to better protect human health and the environment. One example of such a partnership is the cooperative agreement between EPA Region 6 and the Quapaw Tribe which was fully supported by the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality. This groundbreaking agreement provided the Tribe with funds to conduct cleanup of a specific tribal property, while providing a platform for the Tribe to demonstrate its capability to protect tribal homelands. The implementation of this agreement successfully demonstrated that direct local involvement can be more cost effective, and that local communities have a vested interest in protecting their home.

However, an opportunity was missed to continue the cleanup of adjacent property while the Quapaw Tribe was mobilized in the field. This would have saved on remobilization costs. I am fully supportive of providing matching funds for the Quapaw Tribe to clean up non-tribal properties because the Tribe has demonstrated its ability to do high quality work.

States have developed robust expertise in implementing Superfund, and they have a vested interest in ensuring that Superfund Sites within their borders are adequately cleaned up. It seems that strong consideration should be given to delegating the program, or portions of the program, to the states. At a minimum, Congress and the EPA should facilitate cooperation between the various EPA Regional Offices and respective state environmental agencies. In my nearly three (3) decades of experience in the Superfund Program, our greatest successes occurred when Oklahoma has had strong partnerships with the EPA.

Again, thank you Chairman Booker and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to speak to you today and I would be happy to take your questions.