



Colleagues,

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1984 became the first federal agency to adopt a formal Indian policy. Today, I am proud to formally reaffirm the [EPA Policy for the Administration of Environmental Programs on Indian Reservations](#). By my action, the EPA reiterates its recognition of the United States' unique legal relationship with tribal governments based on the Constitution, treaties, statutes, executive orders and court decisions. The EPA recognizes the right of tribes as sovereign governments to self-determination and acknowledges the federal government's trust responsibility to tribes. The EPA works with tribes on a government-to-government basis to protect their land, air and water.

The reaffirmation of the 1984 Indian Policy articulates the importance of the EPA's tribal programs and our relationship with tribal governments. Our work with tribes is crosscutting and affects all aspects of the EPA's day-to-day functions. As noted in the 1984 Indian Policy, the fundamental objective of the EPA is to protect human health and the environment. However, the key emphasis of this effort is to give special consideration to tribal interests in making agency policy and to ensure the close involvement of tribal governments in making decisions and managing environmental programs affecting reservation lands. To meet this objective, the EPA will continue to pursue the following principles as memorialized in the policy document:

1. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency stands ready to work directly with Indian tribal governments on a one-to-one basis (the "government-to-government" relationship) rather than as subdivisions of other governments.
2. The EPA will recognize tribal governments as the primary parties for setting standards, making environmental policy decisions and managing programs for reservations, consistent with EPA standards and regulations.
3. The EPA will take affirmative steps to encourage and assist tribes in assuming regulatory and program management responsibilities for reservation lands.
4. The EPA will take appropriate steps to remove existing legal and procedural impediments to working directly and effectively with tribal governments on reservation programs.
5. The EPA, in keeping with the federal trust responsibility, will assure that tribal concerns and interests are considered whenever the EPA's actions and/or decisions may affect reservation environments.

6. The EPA will encourage cooperations between tribal, state and local governments to resolve environmental problems of mutual concern.
7. The EPA will work with other federal agencies that have related responsibilities on Indian reservations to enlist their interest and support in cooperative efforts to help tribes assume environmental program responsibilities for reservations.
8. The EPA will strive to assure compliance with environmental statutes and regulations on Indian reservations.
9. The EPA will incorporate these Indian policy goals into its planning and management activities, including its budget, operating guidance, legislative initiatives, management accountability system and ongoing policy and regulation development processes.

It is an important time in our partnership with tribes as the EPA builds on past successes and strives to meet current and future environmental challenges together with tribes. Please join me in advancing our strong partnership with tribal governments to protect human health and to safeguard the environment in Indian Country.

Andrew Wheeler

Administrator