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May 19, 2020

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The Honorable Andrew Wheeler  
Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

EPA's Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC) is pleased to present the LGAC's Report entitled, "*Risk Communication*," which offers findings and recommendations in response to our charge. As public elected and appointed officials we are aware of the importance of clear and effective risk communication and we appreciate the opportunity to provide you with the state, tribal, and local government perspective.

#### **Background:**

The LGAC was charged in May 2019 to provide their perspectives from the local level on risk communication strategies, products and tools the agency develops as part of EPA's Risk Communications Workgroup. The LGAC herein developed recommendations related to how well the Agency addresses local issues and what processes the Agency can follow to ensure that federal and local partners maintain close coordination, when issues that involve effectively communicating risk arise.

When environmental, public health or public safety emergencies and natural disasters happen, people need trusted, accurate and timely information about the risks they face, and the actions they can take to protect their health, their lives and their property. This early and accurate information helps communities make wise choices and take actions to protect themselves, their families and communities from threatening health and public safety hazards. Local public officials need to be involved in communicating risks to their citizens.

Communicating risks effectively enables decision-makers to make informed decisions on any actions necessary to protect the environment, public health and public safety. It also empowers the public with the information necessary to protect themselves and their loved ones.

Information can range from media and social media communications, mass communications and community engagement. Risk communication involves the exchange of real-time information, advice and opinions between experts and people facing threats to their health, safety, economic and/or social well-being. It requires a sound understanding of the science, along with an understanding of people's perceptions, concerns, beliefs, and their knowledge and practices. This is where local governments, in partnership with EPA and other agencies, can play a key role. Local governments, states and tribes are in the best position to provide early identification of problems, help manage misinformation and rumors and provide on the ground assistance addressing the challenges.

Clear and consistent communication from all information sources—including federal, state, tribal and local governments—helps stakeholders and the public determine what steps they may need to take to protect themselves and their families. Coordination is such a critical piece of risk communication. Intergovernmental sharing of environmental, public health and public safety information helps the public better understand any potential risks and promotes trust of agency actions to address those risks.

## **Summary**

An important part of EPA's mission and we believe one of your highest priorities is to improve risk communication. That involves improving communication at an intergovernmental level. The federal government must establish a relationship of communication and trust with state and local governments and should consider special efforts to establish trust with tribal governments. Moreover, EPA must involve state, local, and tribal officials in the communications of risks to their citizens. The LGAC appreciates the opportunity to comment on the EPA's Risk Communication plan and commends the EPA for its efforts to improve risk communication and engaging all intergovernmental partners.

Sincerely,

*Kitty Barnes*

Kitty Barnes  
Chair, LGAC

*Victoria A. Reinhardt*

Victoria Reinhardt  
Chair, Revitalizing Communities Workgroup