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EPA head Lisa Jackson promises science-based decisions

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In a no-holds-barred memo to EPA staff Friday, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator-designate Lisa Jackson spelled out her top five priorities for the agency:

- Reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Improving air quality.
- Managing chemical risks.
- Cleaning up hazardous-waste sites.
- Protecting America's water.

Jackson said she will run the agency based on President Obama's "three values that he expects EPA to uphold":

- Science must be the backbone for EPA programs.
- EPA must follow the rule of law.
- EPA's actions must be transparent.

Just as President Obama took a tough line in his inaugural address, listing his disagreements with Bush administration policies, Jackson promised to "change the face of the environment." In a clear reference to the numerous cases where EPA decisions made during the Bush years rejected the advice of career EPA staff or ignored congressional or court directives, Jackson explained that:

"The President believes that when EPA addresses scientific issues, it should rely on the expert judgment of the agency's career scientists and independent advisors. When scientific judgments are suppressed, misrepresented or distorted by political agendas, Americans can lose faith in their government to provide strong public health and environmental protection."

"The laws that Congress has written and directed EPA to implement leave room for policy judgments. However, policy decisions should not be disguised as

scientific findings. I pledge that I will not compromise the integrity of EPA's experts in order to advance a preference for a particular regulatory outcome. . ."

"EPA needs to exercise policy discretion in good faith and in keeping with the directives of Congress and the courts. When Congress has been explicit, EPA cannot misinterpret or ignore the language Congress has used. When a court has determined EPA's responsibilities under our governing statutes, EPA cannot turn a blind eye to the court's decision or procrastinate in complying."

Jackson pledged that as EPA Administrator, "I will uphold the values of scientific integrity, rule of law and transparency every day."

Going into more detail, Jackson wrote in her memo to EPA staff that:

"EPA will stand ready to help Congress craft strong, science-based climate legislation that fulfills the vision of the President. As Congress does its work, we will move ahead to comply with the Supreme Court's decision recognizing EPA's obligation to address climate change under the Clean Air Act. . .

"The nation continues to face serious air pollution challenges, with large areas of the country out of attainment with air-quality standards and many communities facing the threat of toxic air pollution. Science shows that people's health is at stake. We will plug the gaps in our regulatory system as science and the law demand. . .

"More than 30 years after Congress enacted the Toxic Substances Control Act, it is clear that we are not doing an adequate job of assessing and managing the risks of chemicals in consumer products, the workplace and the environment. . .

"EPA will strive to accelerate the pace of cleanup at the hundreds of contaminated sites across the country. . .

"EPA will intensify our work to restore and protect the quality of the nation's streams, rivers, lakes, bays, oceans and aquifers. The Agency will make robust use of our authority to restore threatened treasures such as the Great Lakes and the Chesapeake Bay, to address our neglected urban rivers, to strengthen drinking-water safety programs, and to reduce pollution from non-point and industrial dischargers. . .

"As we meet these challenges, we must be sensitive to the burdens pollution has placed on vulnerable subpopulations, including children, the elderly, the poor and all others who are at particular risk to threats to health and the environment. We must seek their full partnership in the greater aim of identifying and eliminating the sources of pollution in their neighborhoods, schools and homes."