



United States Senate

March 8, 2021

Gina Raimondo
Secretary
Department of Commerce

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

Congratulations on your recent Senate confirmation! I look forward to working with you. I write regarding the issue of DDT contamination off the coast of California. I ask that you prioritize urgent and meaningful action to remediate this serious threat to human and environmental health.

From 1947 to 1983, Montrose Chemical Corporation, the nation's largest manufacturer of DDT, was located in Torrance, California. Despite the 1972 ban on DDT, production continued for about the next decade and it was common practice to dispose of industrial waste off the California coast. In 1989, EPA added the Montrose Chemical site to the Superfund National Priorities List, and investigation of these coastal waters revealed that DDT and PCB-laced contaminated sewage dumped in the ocean had created a serious public health risk.

A settlement between federal and state agencies and several chemical companies was reached to help fund the cleanup of DDT contamination of the off-shore site known as the Palos Verdes shelf. Recently, my staff was briefed by NOAA and I understand that NOAA's related bird and fishery restoration work is almost completed. I also understand that NOAA continues to participate by helping EPA to monitor the water quality in and around the Palos Verdes Shelf.

As you may be aware, in addition to the Palos Verdes Shelf, scientists at UC Santa Barbara recently discovered what they estimate to be hundreds of thousands of industrial waste barrels in varying states of decay on the ocean floor near Catalina Island, about 22 miles off the California coast. The barrels contain industrial waste laced with toxic chemicals, including DDT and PCBs, and some appear to be leaking.

Alarming, some areas off Catalina Island have recorded concentrations of DDT at rates 40 times higher than the highest level of contamination at Palos Verdes. It is scientifically established that DDT, PCB, and other industrial waste are serious threats to wildlife and human health. DDT pollution has been linked to

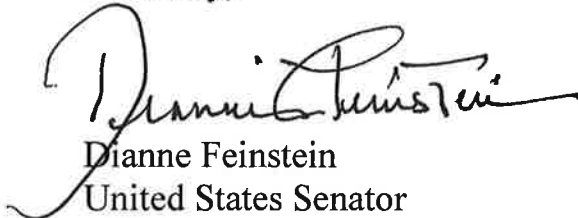
increased cancer rates among California sea lions and is a known cancer risk to humans.

I know that NOAA played a pivotal role in ensuring the first critical mission to scan the ocean floor to learn more about the number and location of these barrels will begin on March 11. Thank you and your staff for their work, especially Admiral Nancy Hann and NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operation's leadership on this and Alan Leondardi, program manager for NOAA's National Oceanographic Partnership Program. I look forward to learning about the results of this mission.

I ask that NOAA continue prioritize both of these issues, and work with other federal agencies to gather information and prioritize finding solutions to these major issues. My staff and I stand by ready to help in any way we can.

Again, I look forward to working with you on these and other California priorities. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any questions or if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

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cc:

Brenda Mallory, Nominee to be Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality
Benjamin Friedman, Acting Administrator, NOAA
Karen Hyun, Chief of Staff, NOAA