

## Should EPA define its own oversight?

It's a shame the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency doesn't see the need to accommodate an independent ombudsman in its ranks in a form defined by the person probably best able to define it — the ombudsman himself.

Robert Martin resigned from his role of 9 1/2 years this week, fed up with what he saw as continued efforts by the EPA to restrict his ability to function independently on behalf of citizens living in communities saddled with hazardous waste sites.

The agency had slashed Martin's staff, proposed to redefine and limit his authority to investigate the agency's operations and finally transferred him to the Office of Inspector General, from where he would have needed permission to speak with reporters or congressmen and permission to pursue investigations. He would have been in charge of a complaint hot line with authority chiefly to pass on complaints and concerns to the inspector general.

One of Martin's more than 30 investigations of the EPA's ongoing cleanups included a preliminary look at the Industrial Excess Landfill in Lake Township — a first impression that raised concerns about testing adequacy and unanswered questions.

Congressman Tom Sawyer struggled against EPA resistance to get Martin involved at the Lake landfill five years ago. Congressman Ralph Regula, whose district will reclaim the landfill next year, said this week he doesn't "understand the rationale for transferring (Martin) to the IG's office."

Two other groups of congressmen have introduced bills that would concretely define the ombudsman's role and expand the office's resources.

And citizens scattered around Martin's investigated sites continue to consider him their saving grace or their last, best hope for solutions in their communities.

The EPA, evidently, would rather define for itself how best to allow self-examination and review of its actions and decisions.

Too bad for the "human health and environment" the agency is charged to protect. -----

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