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Environmental and Labor Groups Blast Gov. Christie for Waiver Rule

Responding to issuance of a final rule by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) encouraging DEP to grant waivers to corporations seeking to avoid health and environmental safeguards, environmental and labor organizations issued this joint statement:

Governor Christie has directed his Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to adopt a "waiver rule" that allows the DEP to gut important environmental, workplace safety, and public health protections at the behest of powerful corporations and special interests.

This waiver rule threatens public health, environment, and workplace standards protected in over 100 longstanding statutes. Waivers will weaken protections for the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the playgrounds in which our kids play. For example, under the rule, the DEP may waive important protections such as those found in the "Toxic Catastrophe Prevention Act," "The Safe Drinking Water Act," and the "Radiation Protection Act." Waivers under these statutes could increase the likelihood of a toxic chemical release in our neighborhoods, lead contaminated drinking water in our homes, or even loosen safety measures at nuclear power plants.

The DEP may "waive" such vital public protections with the stroke of a bureaucratic pen, and with little if any public input and limited public notice, leaving the health, safety, and well being of New Jersey at the mercy of unaccountable government officials. Waivers are especially likely for bad development projects that couldn't pass current environmental standards, and will lead to more polluted air and water and more sprawl, congestion and traffic.

The waiver rule also disadvantages small business owners and local entrepreneurs. Only large corporations have the resources and political influence to vigorously pursue waivers.

Without immediate action, this precedent-setting waiver rule may be the first of many from the Christie Administration. Governor Christie made waiving important protections a political priority on his first day of office by issuing Executive Order #2, which directs **every** agency to adopt similar waiver rules.

Environmental, labor and public interest organizations have sought to work with the administration to discuss alternatives to broad waiver rules (http://www.njwec.org/PDF/Press/WaiverRuleLetter_GovChristie.pdf), but have been cut out of the process. Nevertheless, our broad coalition will continue to oppose these political handouts and protect New Jersey's citizens through every available avenue.