

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

November 24, 2025

The Honorable Jeffrey Cown
Director
Georgia Environmental Protection Division
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. SE, Suite 1456
Atlanta, GA 30334-9000

Dear Director Cown:

We write to express growing concern with the Georgia Environmental Protection Division's (EPD) failure to hold chronic polluters accountable and continued permitting of companies with long histories of noncompliance—particularly Dérivés Résiniques et Terpéniques (DRT) and BioLabs. The lack of meaningful oversight not only jeopardizes our state's natural resources but endangers the health and safety of every Georgia resident. We therefore urge the EPD to take decisive enforcement action and revoke all active permits held by DRT and BioLabs until both companies can demonstrate full and sustained compliance with environmental standards.

For years, both companies have amassed significant records of noncompliance with state and federal environmental laws, including repeated clean air and water quality violations and hazardous releases that threaten nearby neighborhoods. Yet despite the existence of longstanding serious problems, EPD has continued to issue or renew permits for their operations, while imposing penalties too modest to deter misconduct. Too often, these repeat offenders escape real accountability, which has resulted in encouraging further violations. This approach undermines the credibility of environmental enforcement in Georgia and places residents, workers, and ecosystems at unacceptable risk.

One of the most egregious violations involving DRT, a French-owned company that processes pine tree sap into industrial chemicals near Rincon, caused irreparable damage to the historic Ebenezer Creek watershed. In 2023, a manway gasket failure led to the release of an estimated 500 gallons of unidentified material into the surrounding area in Effingham County. Residents raised serious concerns about the noxious odors and health effects following the spill, but DRT was allowed to continue operations without interruption.¹ More recently, a dangerous fire broke out at the same facility—and yet the EPD closed its investigation less than 24 hours later, with no follow-up to assess environmental damage or ensure the prevention of a similar future disaster.²

¹ Williams, L. (2023, October 24). Unidentified material released from DRT America in Rincon. Savannah Morning News. <https://www.savannahnow.com/story/news/local/2023/10/24/gasket-failure-leads-to-release-of-hundreds-of-gallons-of-material/71291538007/>

² Baker, M. (2025, March 21). DRT sparks outrage following fire on site. <https://www.wtoc.com/2025/03/21/drt-sparks-outrage-following-fire-site/>

The BioLabs chemical plant fire disaster in 2024 resulted in toxic chemical releases into the atmosphere leading to the evacuation of around 17,000 people and a shelter-in-place advisory affecting over 90,000 residents across Rockdale County. Air quality monitoring by both the EPA and the EPD detected chlorine and other hazardous compounds, and more than 1,000 people sought medical attention for symptoms such as burning eyes, respiratory irritation, and headaches.³ As you know, the 2024 fire was not an isolated event—it followed a pattern of similar accidents, including a warehouse fire in 2004, smaller fires in 2010, 2015, and 2016, and another large fire in 2020.⁴ Despite a long record of safety failures, the only consequence has been a \$61,473 fine from the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration.⁵ This modest fine is ultimately inconsequential for ensuring BioLabs does not repeat another mismanagement in the near future.

However, DRT and BioLabs are not the only ones who continue to exploit the environment for monetary gain. Many companies, such as Becton Dickinson in Covington, GA, continue to operate with minimal accountability, exploiting regulatory gaps, delayed enforcement, and limited agency resources.⁶ EPD's mandate is to protect public health and Georgia's natural resources with real oversight. That mission cannot be met if we allow chronic violators to operate as usual. Communities in Covington, Rockdale County, and elsewhere deserve an EPD that prioritizes their safety and holds repeat offenders fully accountable.

In light of these concerns, we urge the EPD to revoke all active permits held by DRT and BioLabs until the companies can demonstrate full and sustained compliance with environmental standards. We request the EPD conduct a comprehensive review of their past violations, corrective actions, and risk management practices, ensuring that any future authorization is contingent upon robust safeguards and independent verification. We also ask that you publish a clear timeline for enforcement and communicate with affected communities about the agency's plan to protect their air, water, and quality of life.

Additionally, we respectfully request a response to the following questions:

1. Why has the EPD continued to issue new permits or renewals to companies with long histories of noncompliance, including Green Fuels Energy LLC, BioLabs, and DRT despite repeated complaints from Georgians and documented harm to air and water quality?

³ CBS Interactive. (2024, September 30). 90,000 Georgia residents sheltering after chemical plant fire sent chlorine into the air. CBS News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/fire-georgia-chemical-plant/>

⁴ Kirkland, P. (2024, October 28). Conyers residents demand accountability after latest biolab fire leaves lingering concerns. Georgia Public Broadcasting. <https://www.gpb.org/news/2024/10/28/conyers-residents-demand-accountability-after-latest-biolab-fire-leaves-lingering>

⁵ Atlanta News First. (2025, April 7). Biolab fined thousands of dollars for September chemical plant fire. <https://www.atlantaneewsfirst.com.https://www.atlantaneewsfirst.com/2025/04/07/biolab-fined-thousands-dollars-september-chemical-plant-fire/>

⁶ Beck, T. (2021, November 20). CLEARING THE AIR: News report illustrates confusion in reporting safety of EtO. Covnews.com; The Covington News. <https://www.covnews.com/news/clearing-the-air-news-report-shows-covington-plants-eto-emission-rate-91-times-acceptable-risk/>

2. What criteria does your division use to determine when a “pattern of violations” warrants stronger enforcement, and why has that threshold not been met in the case of BioLabs, which has logged over a decade of infractions?
3. Has the EPD fully assessed the cumulative public health and environmental impacts of allowing repeat offenders like DRT and BioLabs to continue operations in low-income or majority-minority communities across Georgia?
4. What steps has EPD taken to ensure community members have a meaningful role in oversight when reviewing whether to revoke environmental permits for repeat offenders? If none, why?
5. Do you support the creation of a publicly available “repeat violators list” for Georgia industries, similar to other states, and if not, why?
6. Has EPD and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 4 Office engaged in regular communications when critical disasters happen, and what actionable outcomes and recommendations have been made through this cooperation?
7. What concrete changes will EPD make to ensure companies with a record of repeated violations are not allowed to expand or continue operations without proving long-term compliance?


Georgia can and should lead in safeguarding clean air, safe water, and healthy communities. We urge EPD to set a higher bar for accountability and stand up to bad actors who take shortcuts that harm our treasured natural environment. We respectfully request a written response within 30 days outlining how EPD plans to address these concerns.

We appreciate your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



David Scott
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress