

Top EPA Official Resigns over 'Crucify' Comment

DINA CAPIELLO, Associated Press



WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration's top environmental official in the oil-rich South Central region has resigned after Republicans targeted him over remarks made two years ago when he used the word "crucify" to describe how he would go after companies violating environmental laws.

In a letter to Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson sent Sunday, Al Armendariz says he regrets his words and stresses that they do not reflect his work as administrator of the five-state region including Texas, New

Top EPA Official Resigns over 'Crucify' Comment

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana.

The environmental engineer apologized last week for his remarks. A senior administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject, told The Associated Press that Armendariz has since received death threats. His resignation was effective Monday. Sam Coleman, a career official who led the agency's response to Hurricane Katrina and served as Armendariz' deputy, took over as acting regional administrator.

"I have come to the conclusion that my continued service will distract you and the agency from its important work," Armendariz wrote in the letter, which was obtained by the AP.

Republicans in Congress had called for Armendariz' firing after Oklahoma Sen. James Inhofe highlighted the May 2010 speech last week as proof of what he refers to as EPA's assault on energy, particularly the technique of hydraulic fracturing, or fracking.

President Barack Obama appointed Armendariz in November 2009 at the urging of Texas-based environmental groups.

The agency, perhaps more than any other, has found itself in the GOP's crosshairs. Republicans — including presidential contender Mitt Romney, who has called for Jackson herself to be fired — have blamed the agency for high gasoline prices and clamping down on American energy.

Armendariz, who was based in Texas, frequently found himself at odds with the state government and the oil and gas industry, which are often aligned.

The scientist and environmental activist had long been frustrated by the government's inability to clean up Texas' notoriously polluted air, and he had testified on behalf of activist groups about just how badly the EPA and state environmental agencies had botched things.

Ken Kramer, director of the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, said "the only people who will celebrate his resignation are the polluters who continue to foul Texas air and the politicians who serve those special interests."

Several disputed contamination cases in Texas in which Armendariz was involved helped stoke environmental concerns over fracking, a technique in which oil and gas producers inject water, chemicals and sand underground at high pressures to fracture rock so gas can come out.

In one case, the EPA issued an emergency order in 2010 accusing Range Resources of contaminating an aquifer west of Fort Worth and giving it 48 hours to provide clean drinking water to residents. Armendariz said he went around the state because it wasn't responding quickly enough. The order later was withdrawn after a state court ruled evidence that fracking had caused the contamination had been falsified.

Top EPA Official Resigns over 'Crucify' Comment

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

"He was flat wrong," wrote more than two dozen lawmakers in a letter to Jackson sent Friday, calling for Armendariz' firing.

Armendariz' speech was made in Dish, a small town northwest of Dallas, where testing has shown some groundwater contamination and elevated toxic air pollution after operators began fracking.

Referring to how the Romans once conquered villages in the Mediterranean, Armendariz said, "...they'd find the first five guys they saw and they'd crucify them."

"And so you make examples out of people who are in this case not complying with the law," he said. "Find people who are not complying with the law and you hit them as hard as you can and make examples of them."

Associated Press correspondent Angela K. Brown contributed reporting from Fort Worth, Texas.

Follow Dina Cappiello's environment coverage on Twitter ([@dinacappiello](https://twitter.com/dinacappiello))

Source URL (retrieved on 09/01/2015 - 12:15pm):

<http://www.chem.info/news/2012/05/top-epa-official-resigns-over-crucify-comment>