

Environmental groups call for ADEM director to resign or be fired

Updated 1:48 PM; Posted 1:45 PM

By [Erin Edgemon](#)
eedgemon@al.com

Eleven environmental groups are calling for Alabama Department of Environmental Management Director Lance LeFleur to resign or be fired due to what they contend is bias and corruption.

[In a letter to the personnel committee of the Alabama Environmental Management Commission](#), which oversees ADEM, the Black Warrior Riverkeeper group claimed the recent bribery and corruption trial of a Drummond Co. executive and lawyer from Balch & Bingham exposed conflicts of interest between ADEM and those they regulate.

The groups allege public trust in AEMC and ADEM has "severely eroded over the past weeks.

"In order to repair that trust, there must be new leadership at ADEM. When an organization like ADEM stumbles, its director must take responsibility," the letter states. "Director LeFleur has failed to lead the department in a manner that advances the mission of ADEM 'to assure for all citizens of the State a safe, healthful and productive environment.' He must resign or be terminated."

ADEM and the governor's office didn't immediately respond to requests for comment on calls for LeFleur's resignation.

The following environmental groups signed Black Warrior Riverkeeper's letter: Alabama Rivers Alliance, Cahaba River Society, Cahaba Riverkeeper, Choctawhatchee Riverkeeper, Environmental Defense Alliance, Friends of Hurricane Creek, Friends of the Locust Fork River, Gasp, Little River Waterkeeper, and Tennessee Riverkeeper.

In his capacity as ADEM director, LeFleur sent a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency opposing cleanup of toxic pollution at the 35th Avenue Superfund Site in north Birmingham.

That letter was drafted at least, in part, by Balch & Bingham attorney Joel Gilbert, who represented Drummond Co., the environmental groups contend.

LeFleur also testified that it was not uncommon for lobbyists/consultants to draft letters for him to sign, and that he sees nothing wrong with the practice, according to the environmental groups.

Gilbert, a former partner at Balch, and David Roberson, a vice-president at Drummond, were each [convicted](#) of conspiracy, bribery, money laundering and

honest services wire fraud in connection with their efforts to oppose expanding or expediting the cleanup of north Birmingham, which Drummond could be forced to pay for.

The environmental groups' letter was emailed to AEMC on Monday, which is the same day LeFleur's annual job evaluation and public comments are due, according to Black Warrior Riverkeeper.

The letter also claimed LeFleur, his staff and others leaked a proposed presentation submitted by Gasp with parties outside ADEM. Gasp is an environmental nonprofit whose mission is to reduce air pollution through education and advocacy.

Gasp had made a request to EMC to address the commission about expanding the North Birmingham 35th Avenue Superfund site and placing it on EPA's National Priorities List. Gasp provided EMC with a copy of the presentation prior to a Dec. 12, 2014 meeting so that they might be better informed, according to the environmental groups. The contents of that presentation were leaked directly to the affected industry and their lawyers.

The environment groups also claim LeFleur failed to lobby the state Legislature for adequate funding. ADEM ranked last in per capita funding among state environmental agencies in a recent study published by the Environmental Council of States, according to Black Warrior Riverkeeper.

They say this lack of funding is having real consequences, such as the state not having the money to clean up the Colonial Pipeline diesel spill in 2016. The state had to turn over emergency response to EPA.

The environmental groups letter also references [EPA's investigation of ADEM's civil rights policies](#).

Earlier this year, LeFleur abruptly rescinded the department's policies for accepting civil rights complaints. The change came in the midst of a court battle challenging the substance of the policies, and the process by which they were adopted.