

Gary Morton: Fighting to Protect the Environment Above and Below the Ground

If ever there was a man who loves his job, Gary Morton can stand at the head of the line. Gary, who serves as president of AFGE Local 3631, works tirelessly to protect the rights of the EPA employees he represents and has 26 years of experience as an EPA civil investigator and environmental protection specialist.

Gary's job is not glamorous – he performs inspections of underground storage tanks verifying compliance with spill and overfill prevention, monthly release detection with monitoring, oversight, and compliance, putting him at the forefront of environmental protection enforcement throughout Region 3, which covers DE, DC, MD, PA, VA and WV.

With a reduced frontline workforce, Gary says the EPA cannot enforce underground storage regulations mitigating the risk of petroleum products leaking into the environment. Pollution insurance is becoming difficult to purchase because the cost of insuring older underground storage tanks is becoming unaffordable for smaller companies. This creates the problem of funding leaking underground storage tank cleanups.

“Anytime you bury a storage tank underground, there is potential for harm. We’re not the storage tank police, however we work with state regulators, companies and communities to help lower costs, understand issues, identify risks, earn compliance, and work out a solution— together.”

Gary is a kindred spirit to his colleagues who show equal dedication in their roles as protectors of America's environment beneath and above the ground. As the months progress under the current administration, however, their collective morale has assumed moribund apprehension.

“It's well known throughout our ranks that EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt wants to cut our numbers. We come to work with the goal of serving America as a public servant, yet apprehension rides on our shoulders. We're under attack from the top, and that's why the Save the U.S. EPA campaign is so critical to America. It gives us an authoritative voice that shows not all of us are trying to reverse environmental protections.”

It's not the goal of EPA employees to work against companies, but to partner with them to develop solutions that protect the environment. Contamination, Gary says, knows no bounds. Pollution is detrimental to every individual regardless of race, color or creed. Ultimately, companies and others try to hide the problem of aging underground storage tanks by ignoring it. A better solution is to inform the EPA of the issue so that between inspections and monitoring the America Gary and his peers love can be protected.

“I encourage everyone to get involved and call Congress to inform elected officials that we must have a fully funded EPA to ensure our healthy environment in which to safely raise our children, grow our food, and live our lives. The EPA is a public health agency and for over 40 years we have protected the environment, reduced pollution and maintained an environmental standard that has kept Americans healthy. Together, we must fight at the grassroots level to make it the America we want it to be.”