

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3302

May 13, 2025

The Honorable Robert F. Kennedy Jr.
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Kennedy:

I write to strongly urge you to reconsider your decision to terminate 85% of National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) personnel. I am deeply concerned that this reduction in force (RIF) will undermine workplace safety for my constituents in North Carolina and across the country.

Already, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) has said that all Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) have been halted statewide due to federal cuts. This is extremely alarming. As stated on your agency's website, "the Health Hazard Evaluation Program helps employees, unions, and employers learn whether health hazards are present at their workplace and recommends ways to reduce hazards and prevent work-related illness."

In my district, NIOSH opened an HHE related to potential toxic exposure at Poe Hall at North Carolina State University (NCSU). Poe Hall, previously home to NCSU's College of Education and Psychology Department, closed in November 2023 after testing in the building detected high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), toxic chemicals linked to cancer.¹ In February 2024 NIOSH began an in-depth assessment to ensure students, staff, and faculty who spent time working and learning in Poe Hall understood the potential health effects associated with exposure and could obtain the resources necessary to treat potential diseases.

Now, due to your reduction in force at the agency, on April 24, 2025, it was announced that the NIOSH investigation into Poe Hall was abruptly halted. Of the 1000 employees that worked at NIOSH, an estimated 850 have been laid off. This will have profound negative impacts and is already leaving thousands of individuals affected by the Poe Hall contamination with no answers and nowhere to turn.

NIOSH has long helped ensure that workers have a safe and healthy environment in which to perform their duties. Since the inception of NIOSH, workplace fatalities and injuries have declined

¹ <https://www.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/indoor-environmental-investigation-report-all-phases.pdf>

significantly, in part thanks to the institute's recommendations and guidelines. This past weekend, over 100 current and former NIOSH employees sent a letter warning of the serious consequences of the RIF, writing that "more workers will suffer preventable deaths, illnesses, and injuries."² Their warning underscores the critical importance of NIOSH's mission – especially as the modern workplace continues to evolve, presenting new and complex occupational health and safety challenges that require the institute's continued expertise and oversight.

Your reduction in force at this essential agency has put the health and safety of my constituents and workers nationwide at risk. Again, I strongly urge you to reconsider your drastic cuts to this agency, and to prioritize safer workplaces, healthier workers, and a better future for North Carolinians and all Americans.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this critical matter.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah K. Ross", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Deborah K. Ross
Member of Congress

² <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/federal-workplace-safety-workers-letter-to-congress-rcna206076>