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Congress of the United States
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WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT
SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
CLIMATE CRISIS

April 20, 2022

The Honorable Michael S. Regan
Administrator
United States Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Regan:

We write to request that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ensure cryptocurrency mining facilities are not violating foundational environmental statutes like the Clean Air Act or the Clean Water Act. We have serious concerns regarding reports that cryptocurrency facilities across the country are polluting communities and are having an outsized contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. As cryptocurrency gains popularity, it is essential to understand the environmental risks and pollution associated with this industry.

We applaud President Joe Biden’s Executive Order initiating a sweeping review of the federal government’s approach to cryptocurrencies, including reducing their negative climate impacts and examining the energy use associated with crypto mining. Further, we commend your recent decision denying extensions for the Ameren and Greenidge cryptocurrency mining facilities to continue operating the coal ash ponds on their properties past a mandatory deadline. The rapidly expanding cryptocurrency industry needs to be held accountable to ensure it operates in a sustainable and just manner to protect communities.

Efforts are currently underway to re-open closed gas and coal facilities to power the cryptocurrency industry and undermine our battle to combat the climate crisis. While some facilities claim to be “cleaner” by creating energy from coal refuse, these coal-fired power plants still emit hazardous air pollutants and leak toxic contaminants into our waterways. Cryptocurrency mining is poisoning our communities.

Of particular concern is the inherently energy-inefficient “Proof-of-Work” (PoW) mining technology to validate transactions. PoW-based cryptocurrencies include Bitcoin, Ethereum, Monero, and Zcash. A single Bitcoin transaction could power the average U.S. household for a month. According to estimates by researchers, Bitcoin produces annually carbon emissions comparable to Greece.¹ Less energy intensive cryptocurrency mining technologies, such as “Proof-of-Stake” (PoS), are available and have 99.99 percent lower energy demands than PoW to validate transactions.

¹ de Vries et. al, Revisiting Bitcoin’s carbon footprint, *Joule*, 6 (3), 2022, 498-502, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joule.2022.02.005>.

PoW mining relies on massive server farms, which, in addition to contributing to significant greenhouse gas emissions, results in major electronic waste challenges due to the highly specialized and short-lived computing hardware needed to secure the network. Millions of devices quickly become obsolete, leading to large amounts of electronic waste. According to estimates by researchers, Bitcoin mining alone produces almost 30,700 tons of electronic waste every year.² The industry needs to be held accountable for this waste and discouraged from creating it.

Communities around cryptocurrency mining facilities from New York, Tennessee, to Georgia have reported significant noise pollution. The Noise Control Act of 1972 and the Quiet Communities Act of 1978 grants EPA the authority to investigate and study noise and evaluate the effectiveness of existing regulations for protecting the public health and welfare. It is critically important that the EPA uses these authorities to adequately protect communities across the U.S being disrupted by these cryptocurrency facilities.

We request that the EPA evaluate PoW mining facilities' compliance with environmental statutes, such as the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, and engage with the communities when reviewing permits. Further, we ask that the EPA investigate and address any harm these existing PoW facilities are causing communities including, but not limited to, ensuring that electronic waste is responsibly disposed of, and noise pollution is abated. As cryptocurrency continues to gain popularity and demand more mining, we must ensure communities are not left with the toxic burdens associated with this technology.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. The concerns we have outlined above are serious and warrant immediate attention. People living near crypto mining facilities are already suffering the effects of air, water, and noise pollution from these facilities. We acknowledge and appreciate your continued work to investigate and reduce the risks posed by industries such as cryptocurrency PoW mining to vulnerable and underserved communities. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely



Jared Huffman

Member of Congress

² de Vries, A., Stoll, C. (2021). Bitcoin's growing e-waste problem. *Resources, Conservation and Recycling*, 175, 105901, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resconrec.2021.105901>.

_____/s/
Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Brad Sherman
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Jamaal Bowman
Member of Congress

_____/s/
John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Andre Carson
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Jerry McNerney
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

_____/s/
Donald McEachin
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_____/s/
Marie Newman
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_____/s/
Dina Titus
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Mark Takano
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Adriano Espaillat
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_____/s/
Steve Cohen
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James P. McGovern
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_____/s/
Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress