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Nanotechnology May Pose EPA's Greatest Challenge and Opportunity

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For over thirty years, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has dealt with the impacts of the last industrial revolution and the technologies that were a key part of that transformation at the end of the 19th century – the internal combustion engine, steam-generated electricity, and basic chemical synthesis.

Today, another industrial revolution is occurring. It is being driven by nanotechnology and its convergence with information technology and biotechnology. Nanotechnology holds tremendous potential—for breakthroughs in medicine, in the production of clean water and energy, and in computers and electronics. It may be the single most important advance of this new century. Nanotechnology, with its ability to fundamentally change the properties of materials, may pose both the greatest challenge and biggest opportunity for EPA in its history.

The very timely report issued today by the Project on Emerging Nanotechnologies, *EPA and Nanotechnology: Oversight for the 21st Century*, by former EPA Administrator for Policy, J. Clarence Davies, takes a close look at EPA's current ability to address nanotechnology oversight. It analyzes existing EPA statutory authorities and appropriately questions whether they are sufficient for dealing with nanotech. Davies offers valuable recommendations for reforming the regulations, including and focusing on the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), which he helped draft.

The report's conclusion, that nanotechnology may serve as just the right catalyst to revitalize the EPA, is backed up with in-depth analysis and discussion. Faced with globalization and emerging 21st century issues, the EPA must change to meet these new challenges.

Nanotechnology brings with it much uncertainty about potential risks to human health and the environment. In order to prevent adverse harm and to ensure that the benefits promised by nanotechnology are realized, EPA needs to seriously consider the constructive and thoughtful changes that Davies puts forward in his report.