

US environment chief quits after 'harassment'

By Nancy Dunne in Washington

Published: April 22 2002 23:56 | Last Updated: April 23 2002 00:49



The Bush administration on Monday faced new problems over its handling of environmental matters after the national ombudsman for the Environment Protection Agency resigned, saying his files had been seized and he had been locked out of his office on the orders of Christine Todd Whitman, the former New Jersey governor who now heads the agency.

Robert Martin, who was appointed during the administration of George W. Bush's father, had been in conflict with Mrs Whitman for some time, as he had been with her predecessor, Carol Browner. However, he has strong support on Capitol Hill from both Republicans and Democrats, who see him as an effective negotiator and investigator of hazardous waste sites.

"I hope you recognise that by obliterating the independent ombudsman function, you have deprived the American people and the Congress of a valuable means with (which) to keep the EPA true to its mission of protecting human health and the environment," Mr Martin said on Monday in his resignation letter to Mrs Whitman.

An EPA spokesman failed to respond to questions on the agency's actions.

The national ombudsman is an internal watchdog who has been investigating complaints about EPA's performance. Last year, Mrs Whitman decided that the office should be merged with the Office of the Inspector- General, which has less independence. Several members of Congress urged her not to act until Congress could review the transfer.

A spokesman for Senator Wayne Allard, a Colorado Republican, called Mr Martin "a great public servant". Congressman Jerrold Nadler, a New York Democrat, said the seized files "provide damning evidence against her performance as Administrator, and the sooner she can control those files and take them out of the hands of the ombudsman, the sooner a cover-up of the facts can begin".



[EMAIL THIS](#)



[PRINT THIS](#)



[MOST POPULAR](#)

