

Trump's Toxic Superfund Agenda

Administrator Pruitt's Superfund scheme promotes cronyism and secrecy

The Trump administration's proposal for EPA's Superfund program is not what it seems to be.

Despite claims of a renewed focus on the program, Trump's FY19 budget proposes slashing Superfund to levels below the last year of the Obama administration. He's also installed a banker friend -- who has no experience overseeing environmental programs and was barred for life from the financial services industry for "malfeasance" -- to oversee the program.

Superfund cleanups can heal, protect and reshape communities. They deserve significant attention and investment.

But Trump is investing less, and giving it the wrong kind of attention.



What is EPA's Superfund program?

Following a **series of chemical disasters, and reports of human illness and health**, Congress established the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), otherwise known as Superfund, in 1980. Incidents like [Love Canal](#) — where a State of Emergency was declared after a startling increase in skin rashes, miscarriages, and birth defects — and [Bridgeport, NJ](#) — where a chemical explosion left six dead, 35 hospitalized, and a blanket of black smoke over the city — led the government to recognize its role to play in **the oversight and recovery of hazardous facilities and sites**.

Since then, Superfund has **managed, helped pay for, and overseen the cleanup of thousands of contaminated sites** where hazardous waste was [dumped, left out in the open, or otherwise improperly managed](#), threatening families and entire communities. It has also played a key role in the preparation of communities and first responders by performing emergency response, and information gathering and analysis.

The party that caused contamination is responsible for cleaning up the site or reimbursing the government for the work required. However, when there is no "viable responsible party, **Superfund gives EPA the funds and authority to clean up contaminated sites.**"

Today, there remain **more than 1,300 active Superfund sites** across the United States, putting populations at risk of exposure to damaging, and potentially life threatening, chemicals and hazardous compounds. **More than 50 million Americans** live within three miles of a Superfund site.

EPA's Superfund program takes communities from threatened to thriving

Superfund sites present serious public health problems. When remedied, they are a health and safety success story, and can help communities prosper:

Communities at risk

- Living close to a Superfund site has been linked to more [cancer](#), [birth defects](#), and **rare diseases**
- **Contaminated water** can make its way into local waterways and utility systems
- **Contaminated soil** can leach chemicals into drinking water
- Winds can carry **contaminated dust particles** to communities

Neighborhoods see better health outcomes after clean up

- **Reduces the incidence of birth defects by as much as 25 percent** for those living within approximately a mile of a site
- **Reduces blood-lead levels in children**
- **Increases property values within three miles of Superfund sites by 19 to 25 percent** after sites are cleaned up and deleted from the National Priority List

Superfund program in jeopardy

Trump has proposed cutting the Superfund program to funding levels below the last year of the Obama administration.

Scott Pruitt's supposed commitment to Superfund doesn't hold water. A look at actions taken since Pruitt's confirmation as Administrator highlight the ways in which he is undermining the program:

- **Undue credit:** Pruitt tried to claim credit for the closure of seven Superfund sites; however, those sites were [essentially completed](#) before the Trump administration took office.
- **Alarm bells on insufficient staff:** As EPA hemorrhages staff—more than 700 have left since Pruitt arrived—the EPA's Inspector General has sounded the alarm, [saying](#): “Due to insufficient human resources to cover all Superfund site work, some regions have had to slow down or discontinue their efforts to protect human health and the environment.”
- **Unqualified & ethically compromised staffing:** Pruitt hired Albert “Kell” Kelly — a friend of Pruitt's who is [legally barred](#) from working in the financial industry and who has **no previous environmental experience** — to lead his Superfund task force. Perhaps that's why Kelly cancelled his appearance at the last minute before a January Congressional hearing.
- **Wrong approach to public health risks:** Implementation of a “**lean**” process at EPA, which EPA insiders say could be cover for polluting companies [looking to avoid full cleanup](#). A [remarkable training video](#) — produced by a state agency that was run by a top aide to Pruitt — instructs government employees to treat industries as customers, as opposed to citizens and communities.
- **A taskforce doing work in secret:** A task force meeting on Superfund [generated no record of its deliberations](#), continuing Pruitt's trend of secrecy and suppression. The taskforce, which held no public hearings or any meetings with affected communities, may totally change how Pruitt runs the program.