

Scott Pruitt's Toxic Superfund Shell Game

How cronyism, budget cuts and secrecy threaten the health of millions of Americans

More than 50 million Americans live within 3 miles of sites contaminated with toxic waste that has been [dumped, left out in the open, or otherwise improperly managed](#). Living near these dangerous places has been linked to **higher rates of cancer, birth defects, and rare diseases**. Contamination can leech into the soil and seep into plumbing systems and waterways. Winds can carry contaminated dust particles into nearby neighborhoods.

EPA's Superfund program works to clean up the dangerous chemicals and compounds at these sites. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt has promised to focus on Superfund, but he's **hobbling it** instead.

Addressing the Most Toxic Health Risks

More than 1,300 "Superfund" sites are on a list of the **most highly polluted properties in the nation - exposing millions of Americans to toxic chemicals**.

Sites include former industrial facilities, mines, landfills and dumps, dry cleaners and other locations contaminated by heavy metals like arsenic, lead and mercury, chemicals like benzene and asbestos, as well as radiation. Superfund sites also include places where disasters like oil and mercury spills and factory fires occurred.

These areas threaten the public health, since more **than 50 million Americans live within 3 miles of a Superfund site**. Living close to a Superfund site has been linked to residents having higher rates of: [cancer](#), [birth defects](#), and [rare disease](#).

- Communities beyond the sites can also be exposed when site hazards spread.
 - Polluted water can **contaminate local waterways and utility systems**
 - Contaminated soil can **leech chemicals into drinking water and sediment**
 - Hazardous dust particles can be carried by winds and **spread toxics into air**, land and water
- There are Superfund-affected communities who can no longer use local tap water for drinking or bathing. Some communities must **avoid fishing and swimming** in local creeks and rivers.



Superfund Cleanups Help Save Lives

Superfund cleanups have significant impacts. They have been shown to:

- reduce lead levels in children
- cut birth defects among nearby babies by as much as 25 percent.
- Increase property values within three miles increase by 19 to 25 percent.

How Superfund Works

EPA Superfund teams include:

- scientists who assess human health and environmental impacts, (e.g. assessing whether children are safe to play in backyards and waterside parks near the contamination and determining whether fish are safe to eat)
- engineers and hydrologists who help determine how to remedy sites
- investigators and legal teams who identify and work with polluting entities who caused the problem, and coordinate with the US Justice Department to bring cases and enforce the collection of polluters' funds
- liaisons who work with local communities to ensure they are aware of problems and can have an ongoing say in proposed solutions
- first responders and trainers for community first responders

Superfund cleanups have been shown to reduce the incidence of birth defects by as much as 25 percent for those living within approximately a mile of a site.

Who Pays?

- **Polluters who cause contamination are supposed to clean up Superfund sites or reimburse the government** for cleanup costs. Part of the EPA's job is to make sure they do. But if there is no viable "potentially responsible party," (PRP) EPA uses its taxpayer funded budget and legal authority to clean up contaminated sites.
- When Congress created the program in 1980, cleanups were paid for through a special fund in which oil and gas companies paid fees. Congress ended the tax in 1995 and taxpayers must now pay the bill for toxic cleanup if a polluting entity/PRP is not found.

Started After Series of Chemical Disasters

- Superfund was created in 1980 after a series of chemical disasters led to **spikes in illnesses and poor health**. In Love Canal, New York, a state of emergency was declared after a startling increase in skin rashes, miscarriages, and birth defects near a dump where toxic chemicals had been left for decades. In Bridgeport, New Jersey, a chemical explosion left six dead, 35 hospitalized, and a blanket of black smoke over the city.

Scott Pruitt is putting Superfund in jeopardy

Pruitt has promised to provide “immediate and intense attention” to a handful of more than 1,300 Superfund sites across the country. But just as he has been working to weaken EPA’s capacity to protect people’s health, he has taken numerous steps that reduce the Superfund program’s ability to clean up sites and protect families.

- **Less Funding:** Pruitt and President Trump proposed a [30 percent cut to Superfund’s budget](#), along with a 37 percent cut to Superfund enforcement and an 18 percent cut to Superfund Emergency Response Funds.
- **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 and ethically compromised staffing:** The hiring of Albert “Kell” Kelly—a close Pruitt associate who is [legally barred](#) from working in the financial industry and who has no previous environmental regulation or oversight experience—to lead a Superfund task force.
- **Wrong approach to public health risks:** Implementation of a “lean” process at EPA, which EPA insiders say could be cover up 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, not taxpayers.
- **A taskforce doing work in secret:** A taskforce meeting on Superfund [generated no record of its deliberations](#), continuing Pruitt’s trend of secrecy and suppression. The taskforce held no public hearings or any meetings with affected communities.
- **Less attention to the most vulnerable communities:** More than 60 percent of minorities live within three miles of a Superfund, brownfield or solid and hazardous waste “corrective action” site. But the Administration is proposing to cut 100 percent of the funding for the EPA’s environmental justice work under the Superfund cleanup program.

Key Superfund Terms

- **National Priorities List (NPL):** EPA’s list of the most serious sites needing Superfund cleanup. A site must be on the NPL to receive money from the Superfund trust fund for remedial action.
- **Potentially responsible party (PRP):** Property owners, haulers or users who may have contributed to the contamination at a site and may be liable under state laws for the costs of investigation and remediation.
- **Remedial Investigation (RI):** An in-depth study that analyzes contamination at a Superfund site, offers criteria for cleaning it up, proposes alternatives for remedial actions, and estimates the costs of remediation.