

Years of Fear: The Frightening Assault on the EPA And How It Affects Your Community

2017 was arguably the worst year ever for the Environmental Protection Agency. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and the Trump Administration have led a wide-ranging assault on the agency's capacity to protect our children and families from hazardous pollution and growing natural threats. 2018 looms as a pivotal year in determining our country's environmental and public health future.

Since being confirmed in February, Pruitt has forced a dizzying array of radical changes on EPA. More are likely on the way. Below, we take **a look back at the most prominent storylines** from a whirlwind, destructive year at EPA:

EPA's mission has been transformed from prioritizing public health to putting polluters' interests first.

- Pruitt built his political career on support from polluters. [A look back at this calendar](#) shows regular meetings with polluter executives and lobbyists, who often get favorable decisions after seeing him. Almost entirely absent from his schedule? Environmental and public health advocates.
- ***Said one EPA employee who has sat in Pruitt's meetings, "It's just a mystery as to how you can persuade him to not follow exactly what industry asks him to do."***
- Noted Congressman Paul Tonko, "EPA has all the signs of an agency captured by industry."
- Says EPA Founding administrator William Ruckelshaus, who served under presidents Nixon and Reagan: "*I think he [Pruitt] does not support what the agency has been trying to do for 40 years.*"

"Pruitt's Playbook" for EPA is a four-part assault on the agency

- **Budget Slashing**: Pruitt has led a quiet assault to cut the EPA budget by 30 percent to its lowest level, in real dollars, since the 1970s. Adds Ruckelshaus: "What is happening now is taking a meat ax to the protections of public health and environment and then hiding it." The EPA's Inspector General even said of the agency's Superfund program: "[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.](#)"
- **Rollbacks of Safeguards**: Pruitt has been working to roll back and delay environmental safeguards that protect children and families from hazardous threats like smog, coal ash, lead, mercury, benzene and carbon pollution. Says former administrator William Reilly, "There is no precedent for the range of apparently skeptical reviews of EPA regulations."

- **Purging Science and Scientists:** Pruitt has been putting politics over science by purging its advisory committee of many independent scientists and its website of scientific data and reports. Says former administrator Christie Todd Whitman, who served under President George W. Bush, “The evidence is abundant of the dangerous political turn of an agency that is supposed to be guided by science.”
- **Staffing Agency with Industry Insiders:** He’s bringing industry insiders and lobbyists into EPA leadership positions to oversee the polluting industries they came from.

Pruitt is Building a Culture of Secrecy and Corruption at the EPA

- **Secret Calendar:** Pruitt kept a secret calendar (until he bowed to legal pressure to release it).
- **No note taking:** Agency employees are sometimes [told not to take notes](#) when they meet with him and have to be escorted onto the floor where Pruitt’s office is located.
- **Gag Rule:** [EPA barred scientists from speaking at a conference](#) that included discussion of climate change.
- **Secret Discussion:** [The agency is being sued](#) for using an encrypted messaging app that might violate federal laws.
- **Privacy Please:** [Pruitt installed a \\$33,000 phone booth](#) in his office so that he can make secure phone calls without being heard, despite a secure facility already in place elsewhere in the building.
- **Holding Back Public Information:** When asked to provide public information about the salary and job description of a senior official, the EPA press office refused and [told reporters to file a Freedom of Information Act request](#).
- **Travel Questions:** [The EPA's Office of Inspector General is auditing Pruitt's taxpayer-funded travel](#), the cost of which has totaled roughly \$58,000. He still hasn’t explained why he spent 43 of 92 days this spring in his home state of Oklahoma (largely at taxpayer expense). It is widely speculated that he’s preparing to run for the Senate from Oklahoma in 2020.
- Former EPA Administrator Ruckelshaus writes that ***“Pruitt is turning his back on transparency at the EPA.”***

Ideology and isolation are turning the EPA upside down

- **Not Holding Polluters Accountable:** [Pruitt’s EPA is opening fewer enforcement cases](#), seeking smaller penalties from polluters, and barring front-line officials from sending inquiries to polluters without permission from headquarters. Pruitt proposed deep cuts to enforcement programs that police Superfund polluters and leaking underground storage tanks, and [opposed funding for Department of Justice to pursue polluters in court](#).
- **Wasteful Attack on Science:** [Pruitt wants to convene a team of hand-picked researchers to challenge the well-established scientific consensus that CO2 and](#)

[other fossil fuel emissions are the primary drivers of *climate change*](#). A political operative in the Public Affairs office with little environmental policy experience vets grant applications and eliminates references to climate change research from solicitations.

- **Natural Disasters:** [During 2017's hurricane season, the EPA failed to warn Houston neighborhoods about dangerous benzene risks](#) and waged war on reporters who prioritized honest reporting over agency rhetoric—even as the Pruitt/Trump budget sought to cut or eliminate EPA capacity to deal with contamination and support cleanups and train emergency responders. [Pruitt also blocked a rule requiring chemical companies to share information with firefighters and other first responders](#) to protect their safety and the public in emergencies.
- **Environmental Justice:** Pruitt proposed eliminating EPA's Environmental Justice program, [leaving underserved, minority, and at-risk communities vulnerable](#).
- **Staff Exodus:** Amidst this turmoil, [more than 700 EPA employees have left since the 2016 election](#). 61 staffers have left the EPA's Chicago office, which coordinates the agency's work in six states around the Great Lakes.
- Noted former Clinton-era EPA administrator Carol Browner, "***In just 100 days, the Trump Administration has endangered decades of ongoing progress toward better health protections.***" Added former Obama-era administrator Gina McCarthy, "***I'm still waiting to understand how he's [Pruitt's] going to improve public health.***"

[Note: This next section would be put at the top for state and local reporters, with some introductory language.]

The Local Angle: How the Assault on the EPA [Could Threaten Your Community](#)

Air Pollution

- Threats from exposure to air pollution include lung cancer, asthma attacks, respiratory illness, heart disease and heart attacks, brain damage and neurological disorders, and bladder cancer.
- Pruitt is working to delay, weaken or eliminate air pollution rules involving the Clean Power Plan, clean cars, methane, mercury and air toxics, and smog.
- Pruitt and Trump have proposed to eliminate grants that help state and communities reduce radon in homes, and slash air pollution grants that can help reduce "Code Red" and "Code Orange" unsafe air days.
- For more information on air pollution threats to your community, talk to your local [Moms Clean Air Force](#) representative. Check out the [American Lung Association](#), [airnow.gov](#), and [Weather.com](#). Look for Code Orange and Code Red days.

Water Pollution

- Waterborne pollutants like arsenic, algal blooms and coal ash can pose threats that include skin lesions, gastroenteritis, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, numerous cancers, and damage to the nervous system.
- Pruitt and Trump have proposed to eliminate grants that help states and communities fight runoff pollution and monitor fecal, algal and other beach pollution. They want to slash programs to protect drinking water and improve water quality.
- For more information on water pollution threats to your community, check out Safe Drinking Water Act [Consumer Confidence Reports](#) and information from the [U.S. Geological Survey](#). Look for local closed beaches, algal blooms and fish kills.

Soil Pollution

- Threats from exposure to soil pollutants and pesticides include brain damage and neurological disorders
- Pruitt and Trump have proposed slashing funds to clean up Superfund and Brownfields sites, protects soil from chemical leaks from underground storage tanks, lead paint, and to eliminate grants that help communities with lead abatement.
- For more information on water pollution threats to your community, search for local [Superfund](#) and [Brownfields](#) sites where you live, or contact [your state agency](#) that handles leaking underground storage threats.

Chemical Hazards

- President Trump is working to eliminate the Chemical Safety Board (which investigates industrial chemical accidents). And Scott Pruitt suspended the Chemical Disaster Rule (which improves risk management planning at facilities that use dangerous chemicals).
- Pruitt is bringing in officials to oversee chemical safety who have made a career minimizing the dangers of chemicals, including former chemical industry lobbyist Nancy Beck. “Toxicologist for hire” Michael Dourson,” nominated to lead the chemical safety office, had to withdraw after fierce bipartisan opposition.
- For more information on water pollution threats to your community, use [resources available](#) under the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act.