

EPA Budget Cuts: The Quiet Assault

BACKGROUND BRIEFING

Senate Draft Eliminates EPA Toxic Chemical Protections & Cuts Core Functions

The Quiet Assault: EPA funding bill bypasses bipartisan debate

Bypassing a public hearing or bipartisan committee markup where Senators could openly debate and amend funding needs for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Senate Appropriations Committee's leadership released a proposal just before the Thanksgiving holiday that would cut the Environmental Protection Agency's budget for Fiscal Year 2018. The budget will now be negotiated in backroom meetings with the Administration and Congressional leaders as they seek to meet the December 8 deadline.

The Senate bill, like the House bill before it, represents **a quiet assault** on the health of vulnerable children and seniors by undermining EPA's ability to carry out its most basic public health and environmental missions. (During his campaign, President Trump pledged to his industry allies during his campaign to reduce EPA down to "little bits.")

It delivers a big win to the chemical industry by eliminating a key safety program that assesses health threats to families from toxic chemicals, and gives a gift to the fossil fuels industry by cutting the Greenhouse Gas reporting program and reducing EPA research on alternative energy sources.

- Specifically, the Senate bill would undermine chemical safety by eliminating the EPA's foundational Integrated Risk Information System program and cutting its chemicals safety for research. It would also weaken EPA's capacity to enforce environmental laws; keep air clean through research and programs including tracking of greenhouse gas emissions, engage in research to keep water safe, and eliminate public health risks facing America's most disadvantaged communities.

The EPA is already stretched perilously thin by an operating budget that has been **reduced to near its lowest point since the 1970's (in real dollars) despite numerous new public health responsibilities it has been assigned by Congress over those years.**

How the Senate Bill Would Threaten Children and Public Health

Integrated Risk Information System: Eliminated – "A Public Health Debacle"

- EPA's Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) program **provides foundational assessments of chemical toxicity needed to make wide range science-based health decisions and to take actions to protect American families from everyday chemicals around their homes and in their communities** (EDF fact sheet [here](#)). The entire EPA, as well as agencies and states across the country, depends on IRIS analyses to:

- understand hazards that chemicals pose to children and families
 - advise states, communities and tribes during public health emergencies
 - notify communities about contaminated drinking water and take steps to make it safe again
 - make critical decisions about Superfund and hazardous waste clean-ups,
 - provide reviews and risk assessments under the Clean Air Act and Toxic Substances Control Act
- The IRIS program would be eliminated, and at best a small fraction of its responsibilities – and only one-third of its funding – would be re-allocated to another EPA office that is already busy.
 - **Eliminating the IRIS Program would hobble the EPA’s ability to meet its obligations to monitor and regulate chemicals under a variety of laws.** The relatively modest program cost (\$15.3 million) suggests that the impetus for destroying it has more to do with pleasing the chemical industry than with achieving budget savings.

Chemical Safety for Sustainability Research Program: 10% reduction from FY17 spending

- Under the program, EPA scientists and their partners embrace the principles of green chemistry to produce safer chemicals; improve the safe production, use, and disposal of chemicals; and design new tools to manage chemical risks.

Office of Enforcement: 10% reduction from FY17 spending

- The EPA’s Office of Enforcement is American families’ strongest defense against polluters who seek to ignore laws set in place to protect our air, water and soil. The office holds polluters accountable by investigating violations, reaching settlements with polluters, and launching civil and criminal action when necessary.
- Already, the office is significantly under-funded and under-staffed. The Pollution Prevention Act of 1990 requires EPA to have at least 200 criminal investigators. But there are currently fewer than 150 to deal with tens of thousands of businesses and numerous individual polluters.
- By reducing the office’s budget further, Senate Republicans are tacitly reassuring polluters that they will not be firmly held to standards set forth by laws that were instituted to keep communities safe and health.

Clean Air Programs: 10% reduction from FY17 spending

- For decades, the Clean Air Act has helped states and communities make historic strides in reducing air pollution, including monitoring of greenhouse gases, harmful particulates, ozone, lead and other pollutants. The EPA's work under the Act helps support air quality monitoring to detect unhealthy "Code Red" days when the concentration of pollutants in the air could be harmful to everyone, especially vulnerable populations such as children, the elderly, or people with health conditions like asthma.
- Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reporting programs track emissions from facilities that are the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States. Congress would cut 10-15% from oversight and research of GHG programs that help track emissions from fuel and industrial gas suppliers, so that businesses and communities can understand the greatest threats, identify opportunities to cut pollution and develop common-sense climate policies.
- Air and Energy Production Research is critical to understanding the health and environmental impacts of using energy sources such as petroleum and biofuels-fuels derived from plant matter, which is needed to assess costs, benefits and risks in order to make smart choices about energy resources.

Research to Keep Water Safe: 10% reduction from FY17 spending

- EPA's Safe and Sustainable Water Resources research program provides science and innovative technologies to keep our waterways and drinking water safe from chemical, physical and biological threats.

Environmental Justice: 10% reduction from FY17 spending

- Since the country's poorest regions suffer disproportionately from pollution effects – dirty water, polluted air and hazardous waste and toxic chemicals in the soil, EPA's Environmental Justice office works to eliminate public health risks facing America's most disadvantaged communities. Environmental Justice Programs are critical to improving the health and quality of life for families that are focused on their next paycheck, rather than on the pollution that seeps into their water, food and air.

Other Significant Program Cuts

- Research: Safe and healthy communities: 10% reduction from FY17 spending
- Radon, lead and other information exchange / Outreach: 9.3% reduction from FY17 spending
- Children and other sensitive populations: Agency coordination: 10% reduction from FY17 spending
- Legal/science/regulator/economic review: 10% reduction from FY17 spending
- IT / Data Management / Security: 11.8% reduction from FY17 spending

How We Got Here

- In May, President Trump and EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt proposed requested a 30% cut to EPA – deeper than any other department or agency and taking the agency’s funding down to its 1970’s equivalent.
- The House of Representatives voted on its version of the budget in September, including cuts to weaken EPA’s ability to investigate and bring legal actions against corporate polluters. It also targeted programs that help enforce clean air, water and other anti-pollution efforts that protect the public health.
- The government’s Fiscal Year 2018 technically began on October 1, but the Congress and President agreed to carry over the FY2017 budget until a new agreement could be arrived at by December 8 (the “fiscal cliff”).
- In its November 20 Chairman’s mark, the Senate Appropriations Committee restored funds to some programs that President Trump and the House sought to slash, but it went along with many of them and even added the elimination of the Integrated Risk Information System.

What it Means

- The White House, House and Senate budget cuts all would require EPA to continue to lay off public health experts, scientists, environmental engineers as well as staff that manage grants to state and local communities.
- They would also make deep cuts to the core missions of EPA, by slashing the agency’s science and technology work that helps states and local governments fight and clean up pollution, and by cutting funding for the offices and personnel that do the day-to-day work of protecting Americans’ health and safety.
- Says Senator Tom Udall, Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on the Interior & Environment: “I deeply regret that we weren’t able to come together and produce a bipartisan bill... I can’t look past the deep and damaging cuts to the EPA budget in this bill that put public health at risk. And I can’t ignore that it takes aim at the laws that protect our environment and our communities.”