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## 'This Must Be Undone': Trump EPA Finalizes Anti-Science Rule to Limit Use of Public Health Research

"Trump's nightmarish giveaway to polluters will sicken millions of the most vulnerable people across this country."

by

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4 Comments



A sign held at the March for Science in San Francisco, California, on April 22, 2017. (Photo: [Matthew Roth/flickr/cc](#))

Public health and environmental science experts on Tuesday said the EPA's [newly-finalized rule](#) limiting the research that can be used to pass regulations must be reversed by the incoming Biden administration, to end President Donald Trump's "coddling of polluting industries."

Basing its decision on what one former EPA scientist [called](#) a "conspiracy theory" about secrecy at the agency, administrator Andrew Wheeler finalized the "Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science" rule, which will require researchers to disclose raw data, including personal medical records, from their public health studies before the agency will pass new regulations relying on the research.

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**—Vijay Limaye, Natural Resources Defense Council**

The rule will apply to "dose-response studies," in which scientists evaluate how much of a substance creates adverse health outcomes in people.

With what the Trump administration has called the "secret science" rule in place, the EPA could decline to regulate dangerous emissions if it doesn't have access to raw data, including many records that are confidential.

"Trump's nightmarish giveaway to polluters will sicken millions of the most vulnerable people across this country," said Emily Knobbe, EPA policy specialist at the Center for Biological Diversity. "This absurd rule forces the EPA to stick its head in the sand and pretend the most vital science about people's health doesn't exist."

In an [op-ed](#) in the *Wall Street Journal* Monday, former coal lobbyist Wheeler framed the rule as one aimed at protecting Americans' personal freedom, writing, "If the American people are to be regulated by interpretation of these scientific studies, they deserve to scrutinize the data as part of the scientific process and American self-government."

The fact that "most human health data cannot legally be given to the EPA" to help it make regulatory decisions, said epidemiologist Eric Feigl-Ding, is an "evil catch."

"The people pushing it are claiming it's in the interest of science, but the entire independent science world says it's not," Chris Zarba, a former director of the EPA's Science Advisory Board, told the *Washington Post*. "This is a bold attempt to get science out of the way so special interests can do what they want."

Now that the rule is finalized, President-elect Joe Biden and his incoming team at the EPA will likely face months of work to overturn the measure, according to the *Post*. Scientists called on Biden to begin working immediately on reversing the rule when he takes office on January 20.

"Thankfully, this administration and its coddling of polluting industries is finally coming to an end," said Vijay Limaye, a climate and health scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Unwinding this action must be at the top of the agenda for the new leadership at EPA, because it undermines everything else the agency wants and needs to do. We look forward to working with the incoming Biden administration to get back to using sound science to guide policies that protect our health and combat the climate crisis."

Several members of the science community debunked the notion that disclosing raw, personal data is necessary to effectively regulate pollution.

"There's no evidence EPA practices secret science," former head of the Office of the Science Advisor Thomas Sinks told the *Post*. "I'm unaware of an example where EPA hasn't clearly stated what science it is using in its rulemaking."

Dr. Gretchen Goldman of the Union for Concerned Scientists (UCS) pointed to what she called "excessive" requirements scientists must fulfill in order for their research to be used by the EPA.

At UCS, Dr. Andrew Rosenberg noted that the EPA is weakening its own ability to regulate pollution in the midst of a pandemic and climate crisis in which poor health outcomes have been linked to heavy exposure to emissions.

"EPA has chosen to finalize these restrictions on science during the worst public health crisis in our lifetimes," said Rosenberg in a statement. "This rule would interfere with the agency's urgent, ongoing work on a range of issues—including links between environmental factors and Covid-19, the impacts of wildfire smoke on public health, and the effects of the pesticide chlorpyrifos on children—by undermining the EPA's ability to use the best available science. It's a willful decision to throw away the exact tools the agency needs now."

"That EPA leadership has overruled the input of the scientific community, the voices of environmental justice advocates and simple common sense to push this rule is beyond disappointing," he added. "It's a deliberate refusal to protect people's lives."