

New York Times: E.P.A. Targets Dozens of Environmental Rules as It Reframes Its Purpose

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By [Lisa Friedman](#) and [Hiroko Tabuchi](#) March 12, 2025

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In a barrage of pronouncements on Wednesday the Trump administration said it

would repeal dozens of the nation's most significant environmental regulations, including limits on pollution from tailpipes and smokestacks, protections for wetlands, and the legal basis that allows it to regulate the greenhouse gases that are heating the planet.

But beyond that, Lee Zeldin, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, reframed the purpose of the E.P.A. In a two-minute-and-18-second video posted to X, Mr. Zeldin boasted about the changes and said his agency's mission is to "lower the cost of buying a car, heating a home and running a business."

"From the campaign trail to Day 1 and beyond, President Trump has delivered on his promise to unleash energy dominance and lower the cost of living," Mr. Zeldin said. "We at E.P.A. will do our part to power the great American comeback."

Nowhere in the video did he refer to protecting the environment or public health, twin tenets that have guided the agency since its founding in 1970.

The E.P.A. has "no obligation to promote agriculture or commerce; only the critical obligation to protect and enhance the environment," the first administrator, William D. Ruckelshaus, said as he [explained its mission](#) to the country weeks after the E.P.A. was created by President Richard M. Nixon. He said the agency would be focused on research, standards and enforcement in five areas: air pollution, water pollution, waste disposal, radiation and pesticides.

Mr. Zeldin said the E.P.A. would unwind more than two dozen protections against air and water pollution. It would overturn limits on soot from smokestacks that have been linked to respiratory problems in humans and premature deaths as well as restrictions on emissions of mercury, a neurotoxin. It would get rid of the "good neighbor rule" that requires states to address their own pollution when it's carried by winds into neighboring states. And it would eliminate enforcement efforts that prioritize the protection of poor and minority communities.

In addition, when the agency creates environmental policy, it would no longer consider the costs to society from wildfires, droughts, storms and other disasters that might be made worse by pollution connected to that policy, Mr. Zeldin said.

In perhaps its most consequential act, the agency said it would work to erase the E.P.A.'s legal authority to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases by reconsidering decades of science that show global warming is endangering humanity. In his video, Mr. Zeldin derisively referred to that legal underpinning as "the holy grail of the climate change religion."

Mr. Zeldin called Wednesday's actions "the largest deregulatory announcement in U.S. history." He added, "today the green new scam ends, as the E.P.A. does its part to usher in a golden age of American success."

The announcements do not carry the force of law. In almost every case, the E.P.A. would have to undergo a lengthy process of public comment and develop environmental and economic justifications for the change.

President Trump, who has called climate change a hoax, campaigned on a promise to "drill, baby, drill" and ease regulations on fossil fuel companies. Since returning to the White House, he has [degraded the government's capacity](#) to fight global warming by freezing funds for climate programs authorized by Congress, firing [scientists](#) working on weather and climate forecasts, and cutting federal support for the transition away from fossil fuels.

The United States is the world's largest historic emitter of carbon dioxide, a planet-warming greenhouse gas that scientists agree is driving climate change and intensifying hurricanes, floods, wildfires and droughts, as well as species extinction. Last year was the hottest in recorded history, and the United States experienced [27 disasters that each cost at least \\$1 billion](#), compared to three in 1980, adjusted for inflation.

Democrats and environmental activists decried Mr. Zeldin's moves and accused him of abandoning the E.P.A.'s responsibility to protect human health and the environment.

"Today is the day Trump's Big Oil megadonors paid for," Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, Democrat of Rhode Island, said. He called the E.P.A. moves a series of attacks on clean air, clean water and affordable energy. "Administrator Zeldin clearly lied when he told us that he would respect the science and listen to the experts," Mr. Whitehouse said, referring to Mr. Zeldin's confirmation hearing.

Gina McCarthy, who served as E.P.A. administrator in the Obama administration, said it was "the most disastrous day in EPA history. Rolling these rules back is not just a disgrace, it's a threat to all of us. The agency has fully abdicated its mission to protect Americans' health and well being."

Jackie Wong, senior vice president for climate change and energy at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said repealing or weakening regulations on automobiles, power plants and more would lead to increases in asthma, heart attacks and other health problems. "At a time when millions of Americans are

trying to rebuild after horrific wildfires and climate-fueled hurricanes, it's nonsensical to try to deny that climate change harms our health and welfare," said Ms. Wong, whose organization successfully sued the first Trump administration repeatedly over environmental rollbacks.

The Trump administration had been signaling for months that it would reverse many of the climate regulations enacted during the Biden administration. But the cascade of announcements, timed with an op-ed by Mr. Zeldin in The Wall Street Journal and the online video, was designed to attract attention before he is expected to address oil, gas and other energy providers at an annual gathering in Houston.

By midafternoon, the agency had counted 31 pronouncements that were designed, Mr. Zeldin said, to "unleash American energy."

The top lobbying groups for the automobile, oil, gas and chemical industries, among others, applauded Mr. Zeldin's plans.

Anne Bradbury, the chief executive of the American Exploration & Production Council, a lobbying group representing oil and gas companies, called the announcements "common sense." John Bozzella, president of the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, the auto lobby, said the changes would keep the industry "globally competitive."

Marty Durbin, a senior vice president at the United States Chamber of Commerce, said, "American businesses were crippled with an unprecedented regulatory onslaught during the previous Administration that contributed to higher costs felt by families around the country." He said "The Chamber supports a more balanced regulatory approach that will protect the environment and support greater economic growth."

Groups that deny the established science of climate change also cheered Mr. Zeldin's actions.

"The Biden E.P.A. ignored the will of Congress, infringed on individual freedom, trampled on property rights and tried to force the country to use unreliable sources of electricity, such as wind and solar," said a statement from Daren Bakst, a senior fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a think tank allied with the fossil fuel industry that believes global warming has been minimal and is good for humanity and the biosphere.

Some of the most significant policy changes Mr. Zeldin said he planned include:

- Rolling back restrictions on [carbon dioxide emissions from power plants](#). Currently the E.P.A. requires existing coal-burning power plants and new gas plants built in the United States to cut their greenhouse-gas emissions by 90 percent by 2039.
- Rewriting [tailpipe pollution standards](#) that were designed to ensure that the majority of new passenger cars and light trucks sold in the United States are all-electric or hybrids by 2032.

- Easing [limits on mercury emissions](#) from power plants, as well as restrictions on soot and haze from burning coal. A Biden-era rule had aimed to slash by 70 percent emissions from coal-burning power plants of mercury, which has been linked to developmental damage in children.
- Greatly reducing the “social cost” of carbon, an economic estimate of the damage caused by each additional ton of carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere. That figure plays a significant role in weighing the costs and benefits of regulating industries.

Perhaps the most significant move, though, is an effort to revise a 2009 legal opinion known as the E.P.A. “endangerment finding” which concluded that rising greenhouse gas emissions are a danger to public health. The finding gives the agency the authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions. Eliminating it would make it virtually impossible for the E.P.A. to curb climate pollution from automobiles, factories, power plants or oil and gas wells.

Reversing the rule has long been the white whale for climate deniers. But doing so would require Mr. Trump’s E.P.A. to make and substantiate the argument that greenhouse gas emissions pose no foreseeable threats to public health, when decades of science says otherwise.

Jonathan H. Adler, a conservative legal expert and professor of environmental law at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, said he did not believe the Trump administration would succeed. “You’ve got to explain away decades of statements by every administration that there are negative consequences of climate change that can be reasonably anticipated,” Mr. Adler said.

He called the effort to unravel the endangerment finding “a good way to waste years of time and effort and accomplish nothing.”

Use this space to describe your thoughts on the changes being made to the EPA [citing at least three \(3\) examples](#) which are of interest to you specifically.