

EPA

Data reveal 'evaporation of criminal enforcement'

Amanda Reilly, E&E News reporter

Published: Thursday, August 24, 2017

The number of U.S. EPA cops on the beat has declined dramatically over the last dozen years, according to data released today by a watchdog group.

EPA has less than half the special agents in its Criminal Investigation Division than it had in 2003, said **Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility**.

As the number of agents declined, so have criminal cases and successful prosecutions.

PEER obtained the EPA data through a Freedom of Information Act request.

"This evaporation of criminal enforcement is snowballing in that fewer agents generate fewer cases leading to ever-fewer convictions down the road," PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch said in a statement.

"The spigot sustaining complex corporate anti-pollution prosecutions — which take years from genesis to fruition — is being turned off at the source," he said.

Since 2012, the number of EPA special agents has fallen from 175 to 147, the **data** show.

During that time, the amount of new criminal cases opened by the Criminal Investigation Division has **shrunk** by two-thirds.

The number of criminal convictions has also declined. EPA is on pace to obtain fewer than 140 convictions this fiscal year, about the same as last year and a drop from 213 in fiscal 2013, the group said.

The decline has been especially dramatic in cases involving the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act enforcement actions. The Criminal Investigation Division opened 15 air cases in fiscal 2016, the last full year for which data are available, down from 97 in fiscal 2012. Clean Water Act cases have fallen by about two-thirds during that time.

PEER says it expects the case decline to continue during the Trump administration. The numbers, the group says, don't include agency buyouts that are expected next month.

EPA didn't respond to a request for comment on the PEER report.

Earlier this month, another environmental group released a report showing EPA enforcement had plummeted during the first six months of the Trump administration.

The Environmental Integrity Project found EPA and the Justice Department had imposed \$12 million in fines and local governments under consent decrees settling pollution violations, down 60 percent from the average of the last three administrations ([Greenwire](#), Aug. 10).

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122 C Street NW 7th Floor Washington, DC 20001
Phone: 202-628-6500 Fax: 202-737-5299
www.eenews.net

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