



# PEER

Public Employees For  
Environmental Responsibility

## THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S WAR ON CLIMATE SCIENCE: DEFENDING CLIMATE SCIENCE IN THE TRUMP ERA

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The Trump administration's pro-industry, anti-science agenda has undermined the work of every federal agency that conducts climate science and has a broad chilling effect on agency personnel. President Trump himself has [questioned](#) the scientific consensus on climate change, misrepresented facts, [removed all references to climate change](#) from the White House website, repeatedly called climate change a "[hoax](#)," and [said](#) of the Fourth National Climate Assessment—his own government's report—"I don't believe it."

PEER is fighting back against the administration's war on climate science. We provide legal help and advice to scientists and government employees who fear interference or retaliation in their work because it involves climate science, and we ensure that documents and information being suppressed by the government are released to the public. This is part of our broad effort to stand with those public servants who work to ensure scientific integrity in the government's decision-making processes.

### THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S WAR ON CLIMATE SCIENCE

Here is an overview of how the Trump Administration is working to hinder, minimize and obstruct climate science in the Federal government.

#### Environmental Protection Agency

The attacks on climate science have had a significant effect on the work of the EPA, first under Scott Pruitt, and continuing under Andrew Wheeler. Pruitt came into the EPA as an [outspoken climate denier](#). (The Sabine Center's [Climate Deregulation Tracker](#) notes that PEER filed a FOIA request seeking copies of the studies on which Administrator Pruitt based his claim that human activity is not the primary contributor to climate change. On June 1, 2018, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia Circuit [ordered](#) EPA to comply with PEER's FOIA request.)

On May 6, 2017, the *Washington Post* [reported](#) that EPA had buried climate change information on an archived version of its website, after it [removed](#) its climate change

pages in April. By October, Pruitt had overseen the scrubbing of the whole EPA website to remove discussions of climate change, [according to](#) the Environmental Data and Governance Initiative.

Pruitt also [sidelined](#) scientists and career staffers within the agency, [canceled](#) talks on climate change by agency scientists, [barred](#) anyone receiving grant money from serving on advisory panels, [canceled](#) research grants, and [dismissed](#) members of its Science Advisory Board (SAB), replacing them with industry members. *CBS News* [reported](#) that the head of EPA's Board of Scientific Counselors said she had been pressured by the agency's chief of staff to change her testimony before Congress on May 23 "to downplay the Trump administration's decision not to reappoint half of the board's members."

Following the shakeup of the SAB, its acting director then [disbanded](#) the EPA's Ecological Processes and Effects Committee, Environmental Engineering Committee, and Environmental Economics Advisory Committee.

Wheeler appointed eight new members to the SAB on January 31, 2019. One of the new members, John Christy, was [described](#) by *BuzzFeed* as "a climate science skeptic with a history of botched research." *E&E News* [quoted](#) Christy as saying, "There's a benefit, not a cost, to producing energy from carbon."

On March 28, 2018, the Huffington Post [published](#) a leaked memorandum indicating that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s Office of Public Affairs has developed a set of approved talking points on climate change. HuffPo observed that the talking points appear to be intended to cast doubt on the scientific consensus on climate change and humans' contribution to it.

On September 27, 2018, the *Washington Post* [reported](#) that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) planned to close its Office of the Science Advisor (OSA), prompting House Democrats to write to Andrew Wheeler on October 18 to express their "strong opposition" to the move. Currently, however, the EPA website continues to show this office as active.

As recently as March 20, 2019, *Time* [quoted](#) Wheeler as saying that climate change is "an important issue," but most of the threats it poses are "50 to 75 years out" and it's "unreasonable" for the 2020 Democratic candidates to focus so much on it.

## **Department of the Interior**

Over at DOI, discussions about changing the agency website began even before Ryan Zinke's appointment as agency head. A *Washington Post* [article](#) from March 9, 2018, highlighted the role of an Office of Policy Analysis senior advisor and long-time climate skeptic within the agency, Indur Goklany, in working with the Trump team early in 2017 to change the DOI website.

Once in office, Zinke's ham-handed attempts to squash anything related to climate change prompted the Union of Concerned Scientists to publish a December 2018 [report](#)

focused entirely on DOI. UCS documents the removal of climate-related language from agency communications, websites and policies, the [rebuke](#) of National Park Service staff for tweeting about climate change, the elimination of a proposed rule designed to reduce methane emissions from oil and gas drilling, and issuance of an order limiting the research that can be considered in rulemaking.

Many of the reported incidents involve the National Park Service. On April 2, 2018, *Reveal* [reported](#) that officials at the NPS had removed all references to humans' role in causing climate change from a report drafted in 2016 that addressed the impact of sea level rise and flooding on coastal national parks. The report was later published on the NPS website in its original form. Another *Reveal* article dated February 14, 2019, [reports](#) that the author of the report, University of Colorado scientist Maria Caffrey, was told her contract with NPS would not be renewed. Caffrey attributed this to her refusal to accept edits.

One of Zinke's most egregious actions involved the reassignment of scientific staff to unrelated jobs. One of these scientists was Joel Clement. In a *Washington Post* [op-ed](#) dated July 19, 2017, Clement said he was one of "about 50 senior department employees who received letters informing us of involuntary reassignments." Clement added, "A few days after my reassignment, Interior Secretary [Ryan Zinke testified](#) before Congress that the department would use reassignments as part of its effort to eliminate employees; the only reasonable inference from that testimony is that he expects people to quit in response to undesirable transfers."

Clement did leave DOI, and joined UCS, but he also sued DOI. Meanwhile, DOI's Office of Inspector General investigated the reassignments, but its [report](#) said it was not able to determine whether the reassignments violated federal guidelines, because the board responsible for the reassignments did not keep proper records of its decisions.

## Department of Energy

Like other agencies, DOE [expunged](#) climate information from its website, including discussion of the Paris Agreement. [According to Politico](#), a supervisor at the Energy Department's Office of International Climate and Clean Energy told employees not to include the words "climate change," "emissions reduction" or "Paris Agreement" in written communications. And the *Atlantic* [reported](#) that the Energy Information Administration reworked its "Energy Kids" web page to delete climate information, including information connecting coal to greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition, the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board was informally disbanded in January of 2017. Two years later, in February of 2019, DOE [announced](#) that the board will be reestablished.

Rick Perry has focused much of his efforts on promoting coal in keeping with Trump's priorities, but he has also cut funding for climate research. In December 2017, EOS [reported](#) that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) was canceling a \$100 million research project, launched in 2015 and due to continue until 2025. The project, known as "[Next-Generation Ecosystem Experiment-Tropics](#)" (NGEE-Tropics), brought together

over 130 scientists from DOE's national laboratories and external organizations to study how tropical forests will respond to climate change.

On June 15, 2017, DOE [closed](#) the Office of International Climate and Technology (OICT), and informed its 11 staff members that their positions were being eliminated. OICT was formed in 2010 to provide technical advice on greenhouse gas emissions reductions and worked with other countries to develop clean energy technologies. The shuttering of OICT follows a March 2017 [directive](#) from a DOE supervisor telling OICT staff not to use the phrases "climate change," "emissions reduction" or "Paris Agreement" in written memos, briefings or other written communication.

According to an August 25, 2017 article in *Nature*, senior managers at one of the national labs asked multiple researchers receiving DOE grants to remove references to "climate change" and "global warming" from the description of their projects. An [article](#) attributed to *E&E News* later reported that FOIA'd emails suggested the request was prompted by President Trump's budget request and was intended to protect scientists against future grant cuts.

## The Centers for Disease Control

The Centers for Disease Control placed the former head of the Climate and Health Program, Dr. George E. Luber, on indefinite administrative leave shortly after CDC merged the program with its National Asthma Control Program. After several months of investigation into his alleged misconduct, Dr. Luber was notified that the agency would be removing him. The factual predicate for the removal was clearly spurious, and after reporters for the New York Times, supported by PEER, inquired about his removal, the agency withdrew the proposed termination. Before being placed on administrative leave, Dr. Luber had repeatedly objected to rollbacks in CDC's public health practice relating to climate change. Dr. Luber has now been blocked from performing his duties by Center leadership for more than a year.

## Other agencies

The administration's attacks on climate science may have had a chilling effect throughout the government. On November 29, 2017, NPR [reported](#) that "[s]cientists appear to be self-censoring by omitting the term "climate change" in public grant summaries." According to NPR, forty percent fewer grants containing the words "climate change" were funded by the **National Science Foundation** in 2017, compared to 2016. The use of alternative terms, such as "extreme weather," in grants was found to be rising.

The Climate Tracker documents many instances where other U.S. government offices have removed mentions of climate change as a priority or even an item of discussion, in a departure from past work. Early in 2017, the **Council on Environmental Quality** [withdrew](#) Obama-era guidance requiring agencies to include greenhouse gases and climate change in reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act.

On August 20, 2017, the *Washington Post* [reported](#) that the Trump administration had disbanded the fifteen-person Advisory Committee for the Sustained National Climate Assessment, which assisted state and local officials in using the National Climate Assessment in long-term planning. (An April 4, 2019 article in *The Guardian* [notes](#), “The advisory group has since been resurrected, however, following an invitation from New York’s governor, Andrew Cuomo, and has been financially supported by Columbia University and the American Meteorological Society. It now has 20 expert members.”)

*The Guardian* reported that on December 18, 2017, President Trump unveiled a new National Security Strategy, which [omitted](#) “climate change” as a threat. On May 10, 2018, the *Washington Post* [reported](#) that numerous references to “climate change” were removed from a **Department of Defense** (DOD) document outlining how climate change is affecting military bases and installations.

On July 31, 2018, the White House **Office of Management and Budget** (OMB) and **Office of Science and Technology Policy** (OSTP) jointly issued a [memorandum](#) outlining the Trump Administration’s research and development priorities for fiscal year (FY) 2020 that omitted climate change, a departure from the previous administration.

On May 9, 2018, Science [reported](#) that the **National Aeronautics and Space Administration** (NASA) had canceled a \$10 million-a-year research program aimed at improving carbon monitoring. On May 30, 2018, *The Guardian* [reported](#) that there has been a “noticeable decline” in the amount of climate change information published by NASA since President Trump took office. *The Guardian* quotes a former NASA employee who says she was warned not to discuss climate change on social media. The employee was reportedly told that “with Trump as president, climate change is now a sensitive subject.” She indicated that career staff wanted to avoid references to climate change as they were “nervous about provoking the new administration.”

The **U.S. Agency for International Development** (USAID) [removed](#) references to “climate change” in its 2017 sustainability [report](#). In a departure from USAID’s 2016 [report](#), the 2017 version no longer lists “climate change adaptation” as a priority.

On March 15, 2018, the **Federal Emergency Management Agency** (FEMA) published a new [strategic plan](#) in which all references to “climate change” and “global warming” had been [removed](#).

In July of 2018, U.S. **Department of the Treasury** [removed](#) references to “climate change” from its 2017 sustainability report and deleted “climate change resilience” as a goal.

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