

18083 **The Trump Administration and the Environment**

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The discipline of science is one where the facts, once they are peer-reviewed and published in scientific journals, are fixed. They are not open to interpretation, or at least not much. In that sense, it is the opposite of politics, in which nearly everything can be negotiated. But as the days of the Trump Administration have shown, many of those seemingly settled scientific facts – the ones that have informed previous U.S. Administrations – are once more up for debate.

Within hours of President Trump's Inauguration, the White House website was stripped of any mention of climate change or the effort to fight it. The Environmental Protection Agency was ordered to temporarily freeze the grants it issues – a move by a new President that has happened before but one that some officials said went further than previous Administrations. Employees at the U.S. Department of Agriculture were forbidden to release any documents available to the public according to a leaked internal email. And before taking office, Trump repeatedly cast doubt on the safety of vaccines.

Taken together, this is worrisome to scientists. Research supports many of the federal policies designed to keep safe U.S. citizens and the country they live in. Various agencies are responsible for policies that a growing number of scientists say are now under threat.

Early suspicion of Trump and his appointees has some scientists fearing that decades of policies grounded in science could be undone overnight. Nowhere is that concern more pressing than in the area of climate change, which Trump on Twitter called a 'hoax' created by the Chinese. He later said that he was joking, but during the campaign he promised to pull out of the Paris Agreement, the most ambitious international effort in history to address climate change. Trump officials are also working on how best to unwind Barack Obama's signature climate regulation, the Clean Power Plan. The policy requires every state to develop its own plan to reduce carbon emissions from power plants.

Striking or even watering down the Clean Power Plan could have devastating impact on U.S. efforts to fight manmade climate change. Environmentalists also worry that the government may go a step further and suggest that greenhouse-gas emissions are not dangerous in the first place – something reportedly under consideration.

"Whatever people want to believe, greenhouse-gas emissions endanger human health," says a scientist who served as Obama's chief science advisor. "It's not a matter of belief. It's a matter of science."