

Great Lakes Suffer As EPA Continues to Relax Environmental Regulation and Corporate Non-Compliance Increases

In news that should surprise no one, the Trump Administration's decision to walk back the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) enforcement of environmental regulations has resulted in a significant increase in Great Lakes pollution from corporations. The Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC) recently released a report that examined clean water regulation enforcement and found that there was a decrease in compliance cases initiated, civil penalties for violations, and the staff needed to properly protect the Great Lakes. The EPA has also been subject to significant yearly budget cuts, though the agency isn't even spending all the money congress has given it for enforcement.

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As enforcement has trended downward, compliance has worsened. In 2019, there were 62% more facilities in significant noncompliance with the Clean Water Act, when compared to the average number of facilities in significant noncompliance between FY (fiscal year) 2012 to FY 2017.

Environmental Law and Policy Center

The numbers from FY 2012 to FY 2019 are incredibly upsetting. The number of major facilities in serious non-compliance with environmental regulations has risen from 122 to 211. That increase is the direct inverse of compliance enforcement. As non-compliance has risen, compliance enforcement has

floundered.

- The number of compliance cases opened has gone from 340 to 208, while case closures have gone from 351 to 205.
- The amount of penalties assessed has gone from a high of \$1.4 million (2013) to a low of \$303,000 (2018).
- The compliance enforcement budget has shrunk from \$257,000 to \$240,000.
- The staff assigned to the Great Lakes region has declined from 1,249 employees to 940.

Government officials continually claim companies will follow the environmental regulations on their own, but the numbers are clear. Corporations aren't following the rules, and they have no incentive to do so as long as it's cheaper to pay someone to look the other way than it is to do clean up after themselves.

Sources:

- *Report: As EPA pulls back under Trump, serious pollution rises on Great Lakes – Detroit Free Press*
- *Under Trump, the EPA has cut back on enforcement of clean water laws in the Great Lakes Region – Chicago Tribune*