U.S. EPA reverses policy on ‘major sources’ of pollution

After 23 years, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is withdrawing the portion of the Clean Air Act designed to reduce air emissions of mercury, lead, benzene, and arsenic. This move from President Trump’s EPA is a departure from the “once-in always-in” policy established in 1995 and is the latest in a long line of attempts to revoke federal EPA regulations. The petroleum and other fossil fuel industries, utility companies, and chemical manufacturers stand to benefit from the ability to reclassify major sources of air pollution as “area” pollution. More than 4.6 million people worldwide die from airborne pollution yearly and dismantling one of the policies designed to curb it is unsustainable, unhealthy, and shows the U.S. as a country unwilling to put aside petty squabbles and focus on urgent global issues.

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Lower Standards

The EPA and Republicans in Congress like the leaders on the Senate Environment and Public Works committee, Senators John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) and Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), asserts that this relaxing of the Clean Air Act will be a good thing. According to Bill Wehrum, assistant administrator of the EPA’s Office of Air and Radiation, “It will reduce regulatory burden for industries and the states, while continuing to ensure stringent and effective controls on hazardous air pollutants…”

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This policy affects stationary sources of air pollutants, which are divided into two different categories, major sources

and area sources. Major sources release either 10 million tons of any listed toxic air pollutant or 25 tons per year of a mixture of air pollutants. Any other sources of air pollutants is an area source. The biggest issue of contention is the 1995 “once-in always-in” policy that permanently classifies a pollutant generator as a major source (and subject to the increased scrutiny and regulation that come with that) if it is still emitting a certain level of toxins at an assigned date. Now, those major sources that are below the threshold of pollution are no longer subject to the maximum achievable control technology.

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So It Goes

This is not the first effort by the Environmental Protection Agency to recently relax regulations. The Trump administration has targeted over 67 environmental laws, more than half of which have been overturned or are in the process of being rolled back. Most of the reasons for these changes have been economic or bureaucratic. Ironically, the environment doesn’t seem to be high on the list of priorities.

Sources:

- *U.S. EPA reverses policy on ‘major sources’ of pollution* – Reuters
- *EPA reverses air pollution rule* – Chemical and Engineering News
- *Pollutants and Sources* – EPA.gov
- *Trump Administration Actions to Relax Environmental Regulations Should Eventually Benefit Renewable Energy and Transmission Project Permitting* – Husch Blackwell