

Nation's top environmental scientists say the EPA should not be weakened

1 March 2017

As scientists begin to find their political voices, three former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency insiders on Wednesday said the Trump administration should not sacrifice environmental quality and the health of the American people "for a coterie of special-interest stakeholders."

Their opinion piece was published on March 1 in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

"Unfortunately, sowing doubt about scientific evidence has become a widely used strategy for delaying or blocking actions that are purported to potentially affect the bottom lines for particular industries," the article stated. "We need to maintain the capacity to conduct cutting-edge research and to grapple with the application of the results in formulating evidence-based policies."

The more than 2,300-word article is authored by Jonathan Samet, previous chair of the EPA Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee and holder of the Flora L. Thornton Chair in Preventive Medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC; Thomas Burke, former EPA science adviser and former head of the EPA's Office of Research and Development under the Obama administration; and Bernard Goldstein, EPA assistant administrator for research and development during the Reagan administration.

The article points at the key role of [scientific evidence](#) in driving public policy and its place in the laws and regulations that are critical in environmental policy. In the United States, there is a tradition of relying on scientific research. In fact, Abraham Lincoln created the National Academy of Sciences to provide advice to the government. Key environmental statutes, like the Clean Air Act, explicitly base action in research findings.

Lessons from the past show the need for a strong EPA. Ronald Reagan initially sought to diminish the EPA but later warmed up to the agency and

replaced his initial EPA leadership with people supportive of its environmental goals. Under Reagan's watch, the EPA removed lead from gasoline and provided the first EPA-funded studies related to climate change, the article said.

Samet, Burke and Goldstein set up a five-point call to action for the administration:

1. Evidence-based decision-making on the environment should not be abandoned.
2. The Trump administration should continue to engage and seek advice from the broad community of scientists, reflecting the role of science and reason in democracy.
3. Research funding and environmental scientific capacity should be enhanced, not diminished, to reduce key uncertainties.
4. Experts need to continue to carefully track environmental surveillance and to be prepared to deal with emerging problems and disasters like the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.
5. There should be no pause in efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions so that people can lessen the unprecedented challenges of global climate change.

Provided by University of Southern California

APA citation: Nation's top environmental scientists say the EPA should not be weakened (2017, March 1) retrieved 17 November 2019 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2017-03-nation-environmental-scientists-epa-weakened.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.