

Report on President’s Environmental Record so Far ‘Reminds Us that Trump Soap Opera Has Dire Real-World Consequences’

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A *New York Times* [investigative report](#) on President Donald Trump’s nearly two-year environmental record and how his industry-friendly policies are impacting communities nationwide, [published](#) in the Thursday paper, “reminds us that the Trump soap opera has dire real-world consequences.”

That’s according to 350.org co-founder Bill McKibben, who added on Twitter that “futures are foreclosed because he’s a tool of dirty energy.”

Good solid journalism reminds us that the Trump soap opera has dire real-world consequences. Futures are foreclosed because he's a tool of dirty energy <https://t.co/4Orohw97eM>

— Bill McKibben (@billmckibben) [December 27, 2018](#)

The “[must-read](#)” report focuses on examples from California, North Dakota, Texas, and West Virginia, with special attention paid to policy changes at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Interior Department—which have both seen Trump-appointed agency heads [resign](#) amid [numerous ethics probes](#).

Acknowledging a previous *Times* [analysis](#) of the 78 environmental rules—including many implemented under former President Barack Obama—that the Trump administration and Republican-controlled Congress have worked to eliminate, the report details how the EPA, at the behest of industry lobbyists, [quashed](#) a ban on the toxic pesticide chlorpyrifos, which has “sickened substantial numbers of farmworkers” in rural California, where more than a third of U.S. produce is grown.

While that move [is being contested](#) in federal court, it exemplifies how the administration has often defied scientific findings and warnings in favor of demands from pesticide producers, fossil fuel developers, and other polluting industries. As the *Times* put it:

Since taking office, Mr. Trump has consistently sided with powerful economic constituencies in setting policy toward the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the presence of chemicals in our communities.

In the process, he has frequently rejected or given short shrift to science, an

instinct that has played out most visibly in his disdain for efforts to curb global warming but has also permeated federal policy in other ways.

The *Times* also examines Trump's rollbacks—and the subsequent public health consequences—of air quality regulations that aimed to reduce dangerous levels of sulfur dioxide pollution from coal-burning power plants in Texas; policies crafted to clean up West Virginia waterways polluted with arsenic, mercury, and selenium by the coal industry in West Virginia; and limits targeting flaring and leaks of methane on federal or tribal lands, including the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota.

Considering the Interior Department's September 2018 [reversal](#) of such limits after complaints from Big Oil, Walter DeVille, who lives on the reservation and whose wife has been diagnosed with a respiratory condition common among oil field workers, told the *Times*, "We are sort of powerless... This is our reality now."

A *Times* [summary](#) highlighting five key takeaways from the report—which pointed out that while the consequences of Trump's polluter-friendly policies "are starting to play out in noticeable ways in communities across the United States," the full impact "of the Trump-era policies may not be fully apparent until years after Mr. Trump leaves office"—emphasized:

1. Trump has quickly undercut Obama's legacy;
2. Environmental impacts span the country;
3. The rollbacks touch air, water, chemicals, and climate;
4. The decline of coal has not been stopped; and
5. Progress is slowing—but there's still progress.

Although the "[incredible](#)" and "[devastating](#)" report—produced by Eric Lipton, Steve Eder, and John Branch—garnered significant praise, some more cautious language choices also elicited criticism. For example, the *Times* reads, "Beyond the glare of Washington, President Trump's retreat on the environment is unfolding in consequential ways for the health and safety of Americans."

While characterizing the report as "a great package on the real-world, human costs of Trump's gutting of pollution regulations," author and climate activist Alex Steffen noted, "Trump is not 'retreating' from environmental responsibility, he's overtly attacking it."

This is a great package on the real-world, human costs of Trump's gutting of pollution regulations.

Important language point, though: Trump is not "retreating" from environmental responsibility, he's overtly attacking it. <https://t.co/xTzMP2va35>

— Alex Steffen (@AlexSteffen) [December 26, 2018](#)

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