

Quote-Unquote: OIG report warns workforce reductions may sap EPA expertise

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What they're saying.

EPA OIG report warns of potential and widespread capability challenges:

“While the agency may initially achieve some level of cost savings with its workforce reductions, such reductions carry inherent operational risks, including a loss of technical expertise, historical understanding, and practical experience that EPA employees develop through years of service. Such institutional knowledge supports the agency’s ability to implement environmental statutes; administer regulatory programs, such as air and water quality standards; manage hazardous waste and chemical safety; conduct scientific assessments; provide support to the regional offices; and apply lessons learned from prior enforcement actions and environmental response efforts. Institutional knowledge develops over time, making it difficult to replace once it is lost. Without deliberate strategies to capture, identify gaps in, and rebuild institutional knowledge, the EPA faces potential and widespread capability challenges. The agency’s workforce reduction may constrain the EPA’s ability to accomplish its mission, goals, and objectives. The EPA should conduct a workforce analysis to understand its current workforce, identify its future needs, and plan how to develop a workforce that can meet those needs. If the agency does not conduct a workforce analysis and develop a workforce plan, it cannot ensure that it is aligning its staffing levels with its mission, goals, and objectives.”

– EPA’s Office of the Inspector General, in [its report](#) on FY26 management challenges, EPA responding in saying the agency is “actively managing change to maintain a healthy, resilient workforce and to ensure clear roles, efficient processes and sustained capability to perform our mission at a high standard.”

New group seeks to bar EPA from retroactively rescinding dredge-and-fill permits:

“Section 404(c) authority under the Clean Water Act gives the EPA power to veto dredge-and-fill permits issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers -- even years after a permit has been granted. It’s commonly referred to as the ‘EPA 404c veto.’ Under the Obama and Biden Administrations, EPA exercised this power both retroactively -- striking down already-issued permits, and preemptively. President Obama set this dangerous precedent for such action by vetoing Mingo Logan’s Spruce No.1 coal mine two years after a permit that had been duly issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The coalition is concerned that future Democratic administrations will use the 404(c) veto to retroactively block major infrastructure and energy projects approved by the Trump Administration

– including the Alaska Natural Gas Pipeline; Minnesota Duluth Mining Complex; Arctic energy development; LNG terminals; critical mineral projects nationwide; most all projects in Alaska, and it doesn’t end there.”

– The mining-focused “Fix the EPA Veto Coalition” [urges presidential action](#) and a rulemaking to eliminate the “veto” power, [the group](#) being advised by Myron Ebell, who led the EPA transition team in the first Trump administration.

States retreating from climate commitments worries environmental groups:

“We haven’t seen the final language yet, but the reports of where we are headed are deeply alarming. Undermining the law designed to rapidly deploy the cheapest, fastest-to-build sources of new power is not an affordability solution. New York’s dependence on a volatile gas market is what’s driving utility bills through the roof, and the last thing the governor and the legislature should do is rush to roll back the very policies that are poised to break that dependence in this budget. Fearmongering won’t protect New Yorkers from high energy bills. The path to lower bills runs through cheap, clean energy, not through doubling down on the dirty, expensive fossil fuels draining New Yorkers’ wallets.”

– *Several eastern states, including New York, may be considering tempering climate and energy-efficiency commitments to spur energy developments, drawing environmental group concerns, including [this statement](#) from Evergreen Action.*

EPA science guide: General advice or clampdown on publication?:

EPA’s chemicals office has issued new guidance governing how former agency scientists must treat publishing studies that draw on research conducted while at the agency. Two views:

- **‘Confidence in the science we produce.’** “[The Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention] worked with the agency’s ethics office in drafting this memo to provide clear guidance, protect scientific integrity, and ensure all applicable laws and guidelines are followed. This guidance helps ensure our research is credible, our decisions are well supported, and the public can have confidence in the science we produce. The assertion that the memo bars EPA scientists from working with former colleagues is inaccurate, the memo references applicable federal law about post-employment restrictions for former federal employees and does not impose any new or additional requirements. The federal ethics requirements for scientific staff departing from the agency prohibits participation in EPA related projects for a year.”
– *EPA’s press office, in a statement.*
- **Stopping research from ‘seeing the light of day.’** “Once an employee leaves the agency, they no longer have control [over publication]. So if the author/s is/are still at EPA, they can kill a paper they don’t like through the clearance process. Once a scientist leaves, EPA loses control over the product. But the fact remains that it was taxpayer money that paid for all of that work, and it deserves to be published and attributed to the people who worked on it. This appears to be a situation where the agency is grasping at straws in an attempt to stop EPA research from seeing the light of day.”
– *Kyla Bennett, a former EPA scientist and attorney and now science policy director for Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), in response to the new guidance.*

EPA moves forward with plan to alter ‘begin construction’ definition in NSR review:

“EPA is proposing to revise the federal regulatory definition of ‘Begin Actual Construction,’ and add a new definition of ‘pollutant-emitting activities.’ If finalized, the rule will codify how permitting authorities distinguish between stationary sources and non-emitting components or structures, fulfilling the agency’s 2025 commitment to propose this clarification. The change will support the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) infrastructure and power generation, a significant step forward in the Trump EPA’s efforts to provide affordable baseload power for American families and to advance the data centers essential to making the U.S. the AI capital of the world.”

-- *[EPA statement](#) flagging the agency’s previously promised and [now proposed](#) narrowing of its definition of when construction begins to permit projects to start non-emitting construction ahead of new source review.*