Trump’s EPA places a zero-dollar value on human life and health

Philip Guelpa
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Air pollution from industrial facilities is a major source of ill health for people, especially the poor and working class who are forced to live in their vicinity. A prime example is what is known as Cancer Alley, along the lower Mississippi River, which has one of the highest concentrations of industrial facilities and airborne pollution in the US. The resident population experiences overall disease and birth?defect rates up to seven times the US national average. Some communities suffer the highest industrial?pollution cancer risk in the entire country. It is also an area of extreme poverty, with several parishes classified as “persistent poverty” areas—meaning 20 percent or more of residents have lived below the federal poverty line for decades. The long-term effects of industrial pollution on child health and development are especially pernicious.

In a major assault on human health, the Trump administration is changing the policy of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding the control of air pollution. A review of internal EPA emails conducted by the *New York Times* found that consideration of the impacts of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and ozone, two of the most prominent components of air pollution, would no longer be included as part of the evaluation of the effects of industrial air pollution on humans. A draft of the new regulation was released, signed by the EPA Administrator, Lee Zeldin, on January 9, 2026.

The result will be a significant saving in the economics of operating a range of industries, including coal-fired power plants, oil refineries and other major sources of air pollution. Burning coal, for example, emits a variety of other toxic pollutants such as mercury, a powerful neurotoxin, and other heavy metals. The cost savings flow from the reduced need to implement mechanisms and practices necessary to reduce such emissions.

The motivation is clear. As part of its general assault on all the gains made by the working class over many decades regarding conditions impacting life and health, and in the context of the rapidly deepening world-wide capitalist crisis, every effort is being made by the ruling class to smash all restraints on maximizing profit, no matter the consequences. The loosening or elimination of all forms of government regulation of industry is a component of that process. This includes a determined campaign to promote fossil fuels and against renewable energy sources. Trump and his EPA administrator Lee Zeldin have declared war on the very concept of environmental regulation. The latest change is only a step in this overall campaign.

In conjunction with weakening the regulation of the extraction and use of carbon-rich fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas), which are major sources of air pollution, the Trump administration is seeking to hobble renewable energy projects such as wind and solar farms, which are now less expensive than fossil fuels. Solar power generation rose by 34 percent last year and wind power rose modestly.

Trump has already ordered eight coal-fired power plants which were scheduled to be shut down to continue in operation. Greenhouse gas emissions rose by 2.5 percent in 2025, according to the Rhodium Group. Electricity utilities burned approximately 13 percent more coal in 2025 than in the previous year. This is likely to increase markedly as the effects of deregulation grow. Trump also recently halted construction of five offshore wind projects located along the US east coast.

The EPA has stopped publishing data on greenhouse gas emissions, making it more difficult to track going

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forward. In a further move to limit information on the effects of its deregulatory actions, the Trump-controlled EPA has abolished the Clean Air Act Advisory Committee that could have probed the impacts on air quality programs.

Well-established science demonstrates that long-term exposure to these and other air pollutants is linked to asthma, heart and lung disease, and premature death. Under capitalism, workers and their families are considered expendable, only of value to the extent to which they can be used to extract profit.

In evaluating proposed limits on emissions of pollutants, the previous EPA practice was to conduct a cost/benefit analysis, comparing the "value" that projected improvements to human health and lives saved with the cost to industry of tighter regulation. Over the roughly four decades during which this policy was in existence, various administrations employed different calculations of this macabre equation regarding the monetary value of human life and health. Of course, the balance was always weighted in favor of industry. Nevertheless, even minor impacts to profitability are anathema to business interests.

The Trump administration is now acting to eliminate even the pretense of concern with impacts on human health. In effect, this reduces the value placed on human life in the equation to $0. EPA has claimed that it will continue to evaluate health effects, which is difficult to take seriously under a capitalist system determined to maximize profits.

Similar elimination of other limits on the emission of greenhouse gases and other toxins from power plants are also planned, exacerbating the already dramatic impacts of global warming. The last three years have been the hottest in recorded history.

The latest action by the Trump administration follows a pattern set early in his second term. In March, the Trump administration declared that large stationary sources of air pollution—factories, chemical plants, sterilization facilities—could request waivers from Clean Air Act regulations by claiming that pollution-control technology was unavailable and that their exemption served "national security interests."

The fundamental contradiction in evaluating the "cost" of industrial activities on the environment and human health, is that the effects of uncontrolled toxic emissions of all kinds are much more complex to evaluate than the cost of the running a particular industry. Effects are not always obvious and, therefore, require careful, scientifically controlled investigation, which takes time and expense. Furthermore, it is in the interest of capitalist-run industry to ignore or downplay the nature and extent of such effects. Even the limited efforts to identify and evaluate such impacts here-to-fore are now being abandoned, with devastating consequences for humanity.

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