

There has been a systematic war of elimination against protections for vulnerable communities. This includes not only any protections for minority communities, but also those for poor communities, minority or white. While initiated by Trump, the effort has included a ream of destructive follow-on actions. The best way to make the point is a chronological account.

Jan. 20. A “Day One” executive order directs agencies to terminate all environmental justice offices and staff positions.

Jan. 21. An executive order revokes all prior Presidents’ executive order relating to environmental justice, going back thirty years to President Clinton’s foundational order. That order had prohibited federal actions that had a disparate impact on vulnerable communities, disproportionately harming their environments. Notably, the Trump order prohibited consideration of either race or poverty as a factor.

Feb. 5. Justice Department rescinds a Biden DOJ memo on enforcing environmental justice and requires that everyone at DOJ headquarters and in US Attorney offices across the country repeal anything similar they have issued. DOJ also terminates its environmental justice office.

Feb. 12. EPA removes its environmental justice screening tool from its website. Notably, the tool considered poverty, existing pollution levels, and other factors, but did not use race as a factor in screening.

Feb. 19. The Council on Environmental Quality tells agencies that environmental assessment and impact statements should eliminate any consideration of environmental justice.

April 8. Another executive order directs the Attorney General to identify and then attempt to eliminate all state laws promoting environmental justice.

April 22. EPA lays off 200 employees of the Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil rights.

April 23. Trump issues executive order making it “the policy of the United States to eliminate the use of disparate-impact liability in all contexts to the maximum degree possible to avoid violating the Constitution, Federal civil rights laws, and basic American ideals.”

April 29. EPA announces it is canceling nearly 800 environmental justice grants,

May 16. Department of Energy rescinds regulations intended to prevent discrimination and actions having disparate impacts on minority groups.

Trump can scrub environmental justice from government agencies, regulations, and even websites. That will not change the reality that the poor and minority communities bear the brunt of pollution and the resulting harm to health.