

The Trump Administration has been busy repealing pollution laws that protect public health. The health impact of these rollbacks isn't as dramatic as an epidemic. There's a credible argument, however, that it will be just as deadly.

In order to put some numbers on the effects of deregulation, we need to make some assumptions on how long Trump's policies will last. Let's assume for purposes of this exercise that those policies remain in effect through a second Trump term, that a Democrat is then elected, and that it takes two more years after that to go through the arduous process of imposing new pollution standards. This scenario is kind of middle-of-the-road. If Trump loses in 2020, the rules won't be in effect as long. But, if Trump wins in 2020 and is succeeded by another Republican in 2024, Trump's policies would last a lot longer.

Particulate Standards.

EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler proudly [rolled out](#) his proposed new air quality standard for fine particulates. EPA's own staff said that tightening the standard could save 12,000 lives per year. Wheeler, of course, rejected that advice and stuck with the current standard. He didn't really have the option of weakening the current standard, or he would have done that instead.

Wheeler also pooh-poohed a Harvard study showing that particulate pollution is closely associated with higher risks from the virus. He accused the scientists of being biased because they had criticized other decisions made by the Trump Administration.

How many lives could be lost as a result of Wheeler's decision? Over six years, 12,000 deaths per year equals 72,000 lives lost. If the Harvard study is right, combining air pollution with the coronavirus could raise those numbers higher, but we can't be sure of that at this point.

Power Plant Emissions

Another Trump Administration action: repealing Obama's Clean Power Plan and replacing it with an utterly toothless substitute. Independent experts [estimated](#) that the Obama plan would save more than 3000 lives per year. Over six years, that's 18,000+ lives that will be lost due to the repeal. The Trump Administration's replacement rule actually could result in pollution increasing in some areas even over what they already were before the Obama rule. I'm not including deaths resulting from those increases, just to be conservative in my estimates.

Comparison of Risks (Coronavirus vs. Trump EPA)

Putting the potential mortality from these two actions together gets us up to 90,000 deaths. That's for only two EPA actions. The total for all of the Trump EPA's rollbacks would be higher. No doubt there could be disagreement about these numbers, but they do have credible support. Even if we discount these numbers significantly, it would remain true that Trump's EPA is a significant threat to public health.

How does our estimate of lives lost at the hands of Trump's EPA compare with the threat of the coronavirus? We can't really be sure how high the death count from the coronavirus will go, although current projections are below 90,000 deaths. So maybe Trump's EPA will turn out to be deadlier than the virus, maybe not.

What's really remarkable, however, is that there's even a credible *possibility* that Trump's EPA could cause more deaths than a pandemic. Think that one over for a while.