

This post is about an incident that seems strange even for the Trump Administration. It involves a Biden-era regulation of toxic air pollutions from the coke ovens that produce a material from coal to use in steel production. Trump just [postponed](#) the deadline for complying with the regulation for two years. That is not so strange these days. Trump is as free with compliance delays as he is in pardoning criminals, and he especially relishes doing so where coal is involved. The weird thing, however, that his own EPA had reversed its own previous position and concluded that no postponement was warranted.

The Backstory

The Biden rule. In April 2024, the Biden EPA tightened restrictions on toxic air pollutants emitted by coke ovens. The standards tightened limits on leaks from doors, required fence line monitoring for benzene, and imposed limits on previously unregulated pollutants like metals.

The Trump EPA deadline postponement. When Trump returned to office, EPA did an about-face. In July 2025, it issued an interim final rule that rolled back the Biden rule. (An interim final rule reverses the normal process where an agency receives comments before issuing a rule. Instead, the agency issues the rule first to deal with some urgent situation, and only then receives comments and considers possible changes. Most importantly, EPA agreed with an industry argument that three years, rather than two, would be required to implement new technology to deal with leaks.

The Trump EPA reverses course. After being sued by environmental groups, EPA [retreated](#). On Oct. 2, 2025, it [withdrew its interim final rule](#) (IFR) and let the original deadlines in the 2024 Biden rule go into effect. Specifically, EPA said, it did not believe that “withdrawal of the IFR will trigger immediate compliance difficulties with relevant deadlines and [EPA] remains committed to engaging with relevant stakeholders to promote compliance efforts and provide technical assistance.” Indeed, it knew of few instances in which industry was exceeding the Biden standard. It estimated that a two-year delay would save industry \$8-9 million — almost nothing, these days.

This left industry with a January 6, 2026 compliance deadline.

El Presidente Intervenes

This brings us to the present. On Nov. 21, 2025, President Trump issued an executive order postponing the deadlines for two years. After finding that coke is used to make steel and that steel is used by the military, he found that the regulation was a threat to national security. (Don't forget that he also [found](#) upholstered furniture imports to be a threat to national security.) He declared that "the Coke Oven Rule requires compliance with standards premised on the application of emissions-control technologies that do not yet exist in a commercially demonstrated or cost-effective form." "Many of the testing and monitoring requirements outlined in the Coke Oven Rule," he continued, "rely on technologies that are not practically available, not demonstrated at the necessary scale, or cannot be implemented safely or consistently under real-world conditions." In short, Trump said, "places severe burdens on the coke production industry and, through its indirect effects, on the viability of our Nation's critical infrastructure, defense, and national security." If his own EPA is to be believed, these "findings" were sheer fantasy.

[For the lawyers in the audience: Trump's action was taken pursuant to section 112(i)(4) of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. 7412(i)(4), which provides: "The President may exempt any stationary source from compliance with any standard or limitation under this section for a period of not more than 2 years if the President determines that the technology to implement such standard is not available and that it is in the national security interests of the United States to do so."]

The Upshot

What makes this so weird is not Trump's reversal of a public policy protecting public health or his trashing of an action taken under Biden. Both of those are routine these days. Nor is it weird that Trump did so without the slightest factual basis. That's also par for the course these days. What *is* weird is doing this after Trump's own EPA director, who has no evident scruples about favoring industry, said no. There is no indication Trump was even aware of this fact. And it is even weirder, in that according to Trump's EPA, industry didn't have a compliance problem in the first place and would save only pocket change from the postponement.

The Moral: Sometimes the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. And sometimes the right hand doesn't even know what the right hand is doing.