



Environmental Protection Network

Resetting the Course of EPA

Cooperating with Other Countries



This paper is part of the [Resetting the Course of EPA](#) project by the [Environmental Protection Network \(EPN\)](#), a bipartisan network of more than 500 former EPA career employees and political appointees across the country who served under multiple Democratic and Republican administrations.

Resetting the Course of EPA outlines specific and actionable steps that EPA leadership can take to reset the course of the agency to address the most significant and pervasive threats to public health and our environment. As there is no single roadmap, EPN looks forward to collaborating with others to advance the dialogue around the future of EPA and set ideas into motion that will better protect the health and wellbeing of everyone.

Additional Resetting the Course of EPA documents are available here:

<https://www.environmentalprotectionnetwork.org/reset>

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Summary

Collaboration with other countries and international partners results in significant health and economic benefits to the U.S. by addressing priority environmental challenges, including:

- ❖ Reducing global and local greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate climate change.
- ❖ Decreasing global and local sources of air and water pollution to protect human health.
- ❖ Reducing global exposure to toxic substances such as mercury, lead, pesticides, and other chemicals, and reducing marine litter to prevent adverse health effects and protect ecosystems.

Reclaiming U.S. leadership is essential to the success of these global efforts. The U.S. faces a difficult but vital task to restore credibility in its environmental leadership and regain the world's trust. EPA will need to repair and strengthen bilateral and multilateral relationships by demonstrating bold and decisive domestic environmental actions and sharing effective policies, technical solutions, and innovative approaches with international partners.

EPA also must respond to a myriad of international challenges with new urgency, in a world grappling with a global pandemic and questioning U.S. commitments to global solutions. Environmental impacts, like viruses, do not respect borders, and effective responses demand strong international cooperation. The COVID-19 pandemic presents serious challenges but also underscores the need to reimagine global cooperation and innovate new approaches to protect public health and the environment.

Actions on the following five recommendations will help to address global challenges, build credibility with domestic and international partners, and resume EPA's role as a global environmental leader and innovator.

Recommendations

1. **Reinvigorate important multilateral environmental processes.** The U.S. must demonstrate strong, substantive leadership in global processes such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Group of 7 (G-7), Group of 20 (G-20), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). [\[Read More\]](#)
2. **Reinforce and enhance key bilateral relationships.** Strong policy and technical collaboration with priority countries and regions and implementation of environmentally sound trade agreements strengthen both domestic and global environmental protection programs. [\[Read More\]](#)
3. **Support United Nations efforts to protect public health and the environment.** Leveraging the work of the UN Environment and the World Health Organization (WHO), and supporting effective implementation of UN environmental agreements help advance global environmental protection. [\[Read More\]](#)
4. **Strengthen scientific expertise and global science leadership through domestic action.** EPA remains a trusted source for technical solutions and environmental innovation at home and abroad. [\[Read More\]](#)
5. **Expand constituencies to support international environmental cooperation.** Raising awareness and ensuring consistent support within EPA, within the U.S. Government, and beyond is essential to maintaining EPA's role as a global leader and reliable partner. [\[Read More\]](#)

Recommendation #1: Reinvigorate important multilateral environmental processes.

The U.S., through EPA, must advance global environmental protection by demonstrating strong, substantive leadership within important international environmental processes such as the UNFCCC (including the Paris Agreement), G-7, G-20, and the OECD. EPA must seize this important opportunity to move relationships with key partners such as China and the European Union (EU) away from confrontation and toward effective partnerships in pursuit of shared goals that benefit the U.S.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- ❖ Engage with relevant UN agencies to ensure the U.S. reenters (or stops exit from) the [Paris Agreement](#).
- ❖ Coordinate with the White House, the Department of State and other U.S. Government agencies (NASA, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Energy) to develop forward-leaning U.S. positions on global climate change and other key environmental issues, including rethinking how to make progress within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic recovery.
- ❖ Reach out to key international and domestic partners to understand their climate positions and solicit their support, with an immediate focus on China and the EU—critical for success on climate change—along with regional allies Mexico and Canada.

EARLY ACTIONS, INCLUDING THE FIRST 100 DAYS

- ❖ Collaborate with the Department of State and the White House to initiate the development of U.S. strategies and positions that advance environmental and public health interests and encourage more results-based G-7, G-20, and OECD processes.
- ❖ Ensure robust technical and policy-level EPA involvement in UNFCCC efforts, including the Conference of the Parties (COPs) and associated subsidiary bodies. Work with UN bodies to explore new ways to make progress within the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic recovery.
- ❖ Review and reinvigorate EPA involvement in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and programs to address short-lived climate pollutants such as the [Global Methane Initiative](#).
- ❖ Develop options to enhance EPA’s climate change leadership; identify urgent issues; and propose staffing, budget, and implementation plans.

FIRST YEAR AND SUSTAINED ACTIONS

- ❖ Provide ongoing leadership within the U.S. Government and with international partners to address environmental priorities for consideration in G-7, G-20, OECD, Arctic Council, and other multilateral environmental fora.
- ❖ Work with the White House to develop a U.S. Government-wide coordination mechanism for global climate change, with high-level leadership from across relevant agencies.
- ❖ Develop budget initiatives to obtain necessary programmatic funding for climate change efforts.

- ❖ Continue robust technical and policy involvement with global organizations such as the OECD and multilateral development banks, including the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and Inter-American Development Bank, with a focus on the COVID-19 recovery and green infrastructure investments.
- ❖ **Key Events in 2021:** UNFCCC COP 26 (Nov. 1-12, 2021), G-7 and G-20 Environment Ministers Meetings, OECD Environment Ministerial Meeting, and Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting.

Recommendation #2: Reinforce and enhance key bilateral relationships.

EPA’s bilateral partnerships with key countries and regions must be reinforced and strengthened to share policy and technical approaches, gain support in international negotiations, and develop innovative avenues to achieve EPA and U.S. environmental goals that provide tangible benefits to the U.S.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- ❖ Reach out to important bilateral partners such as China and the EU to reaffirm EPA and U.S. commitment to these vital partnerships and to begin rebuilding relationships.
- ❖ Reinvigorate relationships with Mexico and Canada on respective border issues to strengthen environmental outcomes. Highlight importance of North American regional cooperation under the North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation (CEC).
- ❖ Work within EPA and the U.S. Government (especially the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)) to begin setting priorities for coordinated U.S. Government approaches to bilateral environmental and public health issues and to identify sources of financial and programmatic support.

EARLY ACTIONS, INCLUDING THE FIRST 100 DAYS

- ❖ Consult with key partners to develop common programmatic goals and potential joint programs. Priority topics include climate change mitigation and adaptation; reduction of air, water, and toxic pollution; and rethinking priorities to shape the 21st-century economy in ways that are clean, green, healthy, safe and more resilient as part of the COVID-19 pandemic recovery.
- ❖ Build on critical programs under existing bilateral agreements, such as [EPA’s Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\) on Environmental Cooperation with China](#), the [Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement](#), the [U.S.-Canada Air Quality Agreement](#), and the [U.S.-Mexico Agreement on Cooperation for the Protection and Improvement of the Environment in the Border Area \(La Paz Agreement\)](#).
- ❖ Enhance EPA participation in planning and negotiations for future trade agreements with the EU, United Kingdom, and Asia by providing essential expertise to strengthen environmental provisions.

FIRST YEAR AND SUSTAINED ACTIONS

- ❖ Address internal EPA staffing, organizational, and funding needs to meet renewed commitments.
- ❖ Strategize to determine how environmental considerations can enhance the COVID-19 recovery efforts.
- ❖ Build on existing international technology programs such as the [Global Air Quality Fellowship Program](#), the [U.S. Embassy Air Monitoring Program](#), and support for clean drinking water and wastewater programs.
- ❖ Reassess and reimagine EPA MOUs with other countries, ensuring that EPA priorities (climate change, air, water, and toxic pollution) are included.
- ❖ Work with the Department of State and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to continue strengthening environmental provisions of trade agreements in the context of changing priorities due to COVID-19 and to encourage strong and flexible global supply chains.
- ❖ Continue to provide technical assistance to trade partners to ensure effective implementation and help to promote sustainable and transparent global supply chains.
- ❖ **Key Events in 2021:** Introductory visits with Environment Ministers; CEC Council Meeting among the U.S., Canada, and Mexico (annual); bilateral meetings with Canada (biannual) and Mexico (annual); bilateral meetings with China under the EPA-Ministry of Environment and Ecology MOU; and official trade negotiations.

Recommendation #3: Support United Nations efforts to protect public health and the environment.

EPA must demonstrate strong support for and active participation in relevant UN programs such as UN Environment, WHO, and the International Maritime Organization. EPA and U.S. support also are essential for the effective implementation of many important UN global environmental treaties and agreements. EPA should be a leader and driver of enhanced U.S. attention to and participation in implementing [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs).

EPA’s dual mission to protect public health and the environment is unique among counterpart agencies around the world and can provide an important model, especially as countries develop COVID-19 recovery strategies.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- ❖ Initiate high-level outreach to relevant UN organizations to reaffirm EPA and U.S. commitments, particularly to UN Environment and WHO.
- ❖ Re-engage in major UN programs by providing expert input and staff to meetings, information, technical products, and policy approaches.
- ❖ Collaborate across the U.S. Government to explore sources of funding and support for critical UN environment and health programs, particularly within the context of COVID-19 recovery, and the [UN’s commitment](#) to “shape the 21st-century economy in ways that are clean, green, healthy, safe and more resilient.”

EARLY ACTIONS, INCLUDING THE FIRST 100 DAYS

- ❖ Ensure strong EPA participation in substantive preparations for the 2021 UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) and World Health Assembly.
- ❖ Build support for greater EPA and U.S. commitment to implementation of the [UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and 17 SDGs.
- ❖ Coordinate within EPA and the U.S. Government to maintain strong technical and policy support for important global treaties, including the [Minamata Convention on Mercury](#), [Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer \(Kigali Agreement\)](#), [Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution \(LRTAP\)](#), [Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter \(London Convention\)](#), and [Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment in the Wider Caribbean Region \(Cartagena Convention\)](#).
- ❖ Work within the U.S. Government and Congress to explore formal ratification of key global treaties that the U.S. has not joined, with an immediate push to ratify the [Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal \(Basel Convention\)](#).
- ❖ Promote targeted approaches to environmental improvements through UN-led partnerships such as the [Global Mercury Partnership](#), [Partnership for Clean Fuels and Vehicles](#), and [Trash-Free Waters](#).

FIRST YEAR AND SUSTAINED ACTIONS

- ❖ Address key staffing, organizational, and funding needs to support more robust international engagement with UN efforts.
- ❖ Assess U.S. engagement with (and potential ratification of) other international environmental treaties, including the [Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade](#) and the [Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants](#).
- ❖ **Key Events in 2021:** UNEA (March 2021), World Health Assembly, various COPs and related technical meetings, and [UN SDG forums](#).

Recommendation #4: Strengthen scientific expertise and global science leadership through domestic action.

EPA remains a valued and trusted source for evidence-based technical solutions and environmental innovation at home and abroad. Sharing these approaches with international partners promotes better environmental outcomes. It also enhances EPA and U.S. leadership by highlighting expertise and results, and by demonstrating strong U.S. commitments to global environmental protection.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- ❖ Consult within EPA to review current work, identify opportunities for enhanced cooperation, and begin to develop steps to advance international scientific and technical collaboration.

- ❖ Explore opportunities to share expertise and experience with effective EPA technical approaches such as risk assessment, cost-benefit and economic analyses, mobile-source emissions testing, emissions inventories, greenhouse-gas reporting, environmental impact analyses, environmental sensors and monitoring, and transparent data-sharing.

EARLY ACTIONS, INCLUDING THE FIRST 100 DAYS

- ❖ Explore ways to enhance cooperation with relevant USAID science and technology programs, including [SERVIR](#) (use of satellite imagery and climate and weather information), [Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research](#), and the [Global Development Lab](#), which works in developing countries to build scientific research capacity.
- ❖ Strengthen relationships with key organizations working on global science and technology, such as the National Science Foundation and the National Academy of Sciences.
- ❖ Coordinate with the Department of State to determine how the U.S. Government science and technology agreements with other countries might be leveraged to support EPA priorities. (The U.S. Government currently manages 60 bilateral science and technology agreements, as well as four Joint Science and Technology Funds.)
- ❖ Reconstruct and update EPA’s wealth of data, analyses, and learning for global use.
- ❖ Begin to set international science, research, and policy priorities, and establish funding and staffing.

FIRST YEAR AND SUSTAINED ACTIONS

- ❖ Enhance coordination on [EPA’s Report on the Environment](#) with organizations such as UN Environment and the European Environment Agency and their efforts to monitor, analyze, and report on the state of the global and European environments ([Global Environmental Outlook](#), [European State of Environment Report](#)), including assessments of policies and trends.
- ❖ Expand involvement in the Group on Earth Observations, an intergovernmental partnership working to improve the availability, access, and use of open Earth observations to impact policy and decision-making.
- ❖ Collaborate with the Department of State to leverage the [U.S. Embassy Science Fellows program](#) to support EPA priorities and share EPA expertise.
- ❖ Develop new programs to sponsor international science fellowships, research and training exchanges, and establish speaker programs on trending international environmental and public health issues and emerging global policy and scientific challenges.
- ❖ Enhance EPA and U.S. ability to share effective technical approaches globally by expanding work with relevant agencies and experts at the National Institutes of Health, Centers for Disease Control, U.S. Department of Agriculture, state and local governments, as well as experienced EPA alumni.

Recommendation #5: Expand constituencies to support international environmental cooperation.

EPA must raise awareness and build constituencies in support of international environmental and public health cooperation within EPA, within the U.S. Government, and beyond, including Congress and non-governmental organizations. These efforts are necessary to recognize key accomplishments, highlight the value to the U.S., and ensure continued availability of sufficient resources for EPA to remain a global leader and reliable partner.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- ❖ Develop a clear and robust messaging and communications strategy highlighting the results, effectiveness, and importance of EPA’s international cooperation.
- ❖ Brief EPA leadership and senior management throughout the agency to raise awareness and begin to build support for EPA’s international engagement in all program and regional offices.

EARLY ACTIONS, INCLUDING THE FIRST 100 DAYS

- ❖ Create and disseminate a memo from the EPA Administrator to reinforce the importance of EPA’s active participation in international environmental cooperation and to encourage strong support and participation throughout the agency.
- ❖ Organize discussions with individual EPA offices to better understand current international work and jointly explore development of future programs.
- ❖ Reach out to important partners within the U.S. Government such as the Department of State and USAID to gain their support for and input on EPA’s international agenda and to explore potential funding sources.
- ❖ Based on these initial discussions, organize a series of informal consultative meetings with a range of outside organizations to gather information and suggestions for the direction of EPA’s international engagement and identification of programmatic gaps.
- ❖ Explore potential co-sponsorship with a respected outside organization such as the Woodrow Wilson Center to assist in the development of a stakeholder engagement and planning process to develop an EPA International Roadmap that will identify needs, confirm priorities, and outline programmatic actions.

FIRST YEAR AND SUSTAINED ACTIONS

- ❖ Explore opportunities through EPA’s Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations to provide briefings for key Congressional staff and members on relevant Committees to raise awareness of and develop support for EPA’s international programs.
- ❖ Convene discussions on the margins of international environmental meetings, conferences, and COPs to gain input on an EPA International Roadmap development process.
- ❖ Complete, announce, and disseminate the first iteration of the EPA International Roadmap.

- ❖ Continue consultations with key partners and stakeholders on a regular basis to request input on EPA’s international work and to facilitate periodic updates of the EPA International Roadmap.
- ❖ Enhance EPA’s administrative capabilities that support international programs (e.g., grants, interagency agreements, budgeting, and personnel).
- ❖ Review and maximize existing legal and policy mechanisms to support EPA’s international programs and explore legislative improvements, as needed.

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