



Resetting the Course of EPA

Increasing Funding to Protect Public Health and the Environment



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>

For more information, please contact EPN: reset@environmentalprotectionnetwork.org

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Summary

EPA has been substantially “hollowed out” from inadequate resources that have long been dangerously declining to a point where EPA is spending, in real dollars, less than half what the agency spent in 1980. The continued erosion of EPA carries a heavy public health cost. EPA programs make our nation safer and healthier, protecting the places we live and work, the air we breathe, and the water we drink.

As the budgets of EPA and states have shrunk, their responsibilities have grown. Today’s EPA must protect a growing population from an expanding set of health and environmental risks.

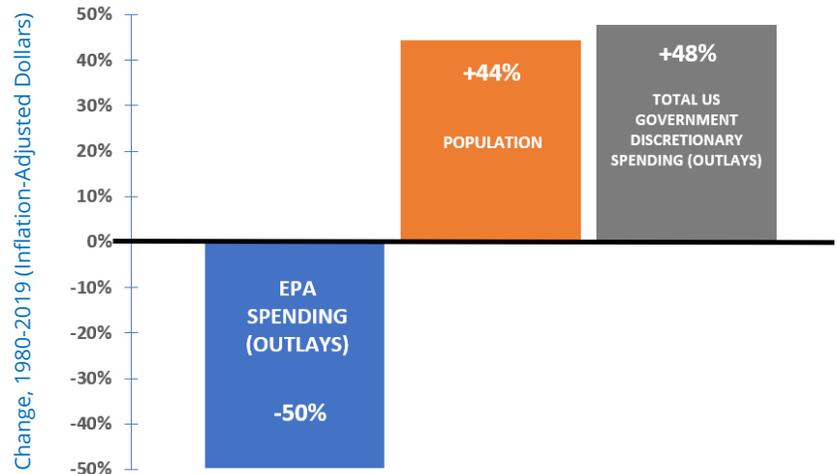
While Congress has rejected many of the Trump administration’s proposed budget cuts to EPA, the debate has distracted attention away from the need for *added* EPA and state resources to adequately protect public health and the environment. If EPA spending since 1980 had just kept pace with increases in discretionary federal spending, as the agency has taken on a growing list of environmental responsibilities, its budget would be three times as large as it is today. [\[Read More\]](#)

States are core agency partners in protecting public health and the environment and depend on EPA for more than 25% of their environmental operating budgets. States have likewise faced declining resources, with [40 states reducing environmental staffing](#) during the last decade. They need budget support from EPA now more than ever. [\[Read More\]](#)

Recommendation

Increase funding for EPA and states’ core capacity to implement the regulatory and enforcement programs that protect public health and the environment. EPA leadership should work with the White House and Congress and publicly declare a four-year goal of rebuilding EPA’s budget to its 40-year average (\$11.4 billion in 2019 dollars). EPA and state core programs are the backbone and muscle of the nation’s environmental protection system, protecting air, water, and drinking water; addressing the harmful effects of pesticides, chemicals, and hazardous waste; promoting environmental justice; and responding to emergencies. As EPA adapts to meet the environmental challenges of the 21st century, the agency’s new programs and initiatives will be far more effective when built upon fully restored core capacity. [\[Read More\]](#)

In Real Dollars, EPA Spending Has Been Cut in Half Since 1980



Sources: OMB, [Historical Tables](#), "Table 4.1—Outlays by Agency: 1962–2025" (adjusted to real dollars using U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis' [implicit price deflator](#)); "Table 8.8 – Outlays for Discretionary Programs."

Recommendation: Increase funding for EPA and states’ core capacity to implement the regulatory and enforcement programs that protect public health and the environment.

EPA and state core programs are the backbone and muscle of the nation’s environmental protection system, protecting air, water, and drinking water; addressing the harmful effects of pesticides, chemicals, and hazardous waste; promoting environmental justice; and responding to emergencies.

EPA’s core functions and programs are funded through four budget accounts:

- ❖ Environmental Programs and Management,
- ❖ Science and Technology,
- ❖ Superfund, and
- ❖ State and Tribal Assistance Grants.

IMMEDIATE ACTIONS

- ❖ Assess and communicate environmental budget needs, including the harmful effects of maintaining the inadequate levels of current support for EPA and state programs.
- ❖ Order an assessment of the need for adequate funding throughout the agency that protects and enhances core EPA staff, programs, and functions while seeking additional resources for new initiatives and priorities without stripping EPA funding for core agency programs and activities.
- ❖ Order briefings on historic levels of EPA funding and staffing for all activities, with emphasis on core programs and activities. Briefings should address those functions and explain the importance of core agency programs and activities and a budget that aligns with EPA’s strategic needs.

EARLY ACTIONS, INCLUDING THE FIRST 100 DAYS

- ❖ Use results of briefings and assessment to inform development of the proposed 2022 and succeeding budgets, including EPA operating plans that protect and enhance the agency’s core programs and activities and its ability to promote environmental justice.
- ❖ Inform Congress and build support for the budget throughout the appropriations process.
- ❖ Communicate the harmful effects of a de facto practice of level funding for EPA and states from year to year, focusing on core environmental protection activities and staff.

FIRST YEAR AND SUSTAINED ACTIONS

- ❖ Develop the EPA budget in a dynamic, not static, process with continuous adjustments to reflect the agency’s changing role so that it can fully pursue its mission in the 21st century.
- ❖ Develop proposed budgets that align with EPA’s strategic needs based on a more detailed and comprehensive resource needs assessment. Incorporate findings of the assessment into development of future EPA operating plans and budget proposals.
- ❖ Direct additional research and interoffice task force(s) accordingly.
- ❖ Institutionalize the budget assessment process, with ongoing task forces to identify and revise greatest needs. This extends across the entire budget, but focuses on core activity.

EPA Budget Background: The slow starvation of EPA and states has come at a heavy cost to public health.

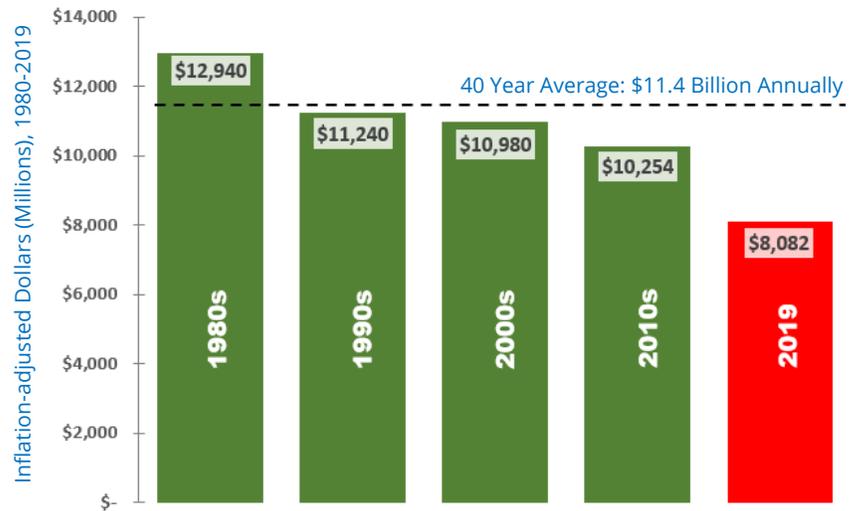
Even before the Trump administration proposed steep budget cuts to EPA, the agency's resources had been effectively declining for decades as budget levels failed to keep up with inflation and with EPA's increasing responsibilities.

For example:

- ❖ In 1980, federal EPA spending (outlays), adjusted for inflation, was twice what it is now.
- ❖ More recently, federal spending by EPA in real dollars has been in decline since 2004, when it was 45% higher than it is today.
- ❖ EPA's staff was 28% larger under President Clinton in 1999 than today's EPA.

These declines have occurred even as EPA's [congressionally-mandated environmental responsibilities](#) have increased substantially.

EPA Average Annual Spending (Outlays)



Sources: OMB, [Historical Tables](#), "Table 4.1—Outlays by Agency: 1962–2025" (adjusted to real dollars using U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis' [implicit price deflator](#))

Looking ahead, EPA must continue its ongoing work and address a growing list of health and environmental challenges including climate change, pandemics, and the cumulative effects of exposure to toxic pollution, particularly on communities of color and low-income communities.

The continued erosion of EPA's budget carries a heavy public health burden. EPA programs make our nation safer and healthier, protecting the places we live and work, the air we breathe, and the water we drink and use. These protections create tremendous benefits, reducing health care costs and making all of our nation's people safer, including vulnerable and overburdened communities of color and low-income communities. The tangible benefits of EPA programs include fewer premature deaths, lower rates of lung and heart disease, reduced infant mortality, fewer emergency room visits, and less time lost from school and work from illness.

Some example studies on the benefits and costs of EPA's environmental and public health protections:

- ❖ A [2019 OMB report](#) estimated the annual benefits of 39 EPA regulations over a decade at between \$194 and \$687 billion, far outweighing costs to polluters which was less than \$55 billion.
- ❖ [An EPA study](#) on 30 years of air quality improvements under the Clean Air Act found benefits of more than \$2 trillion, 30 times more than the costs of \$65 billion.
- ❖ Retrospective studies illustrate that regulatory costs are often overestimated, for example, by ignoring industry's capacity to adapt. A case in point is the requirement for power plants to limit their mercury

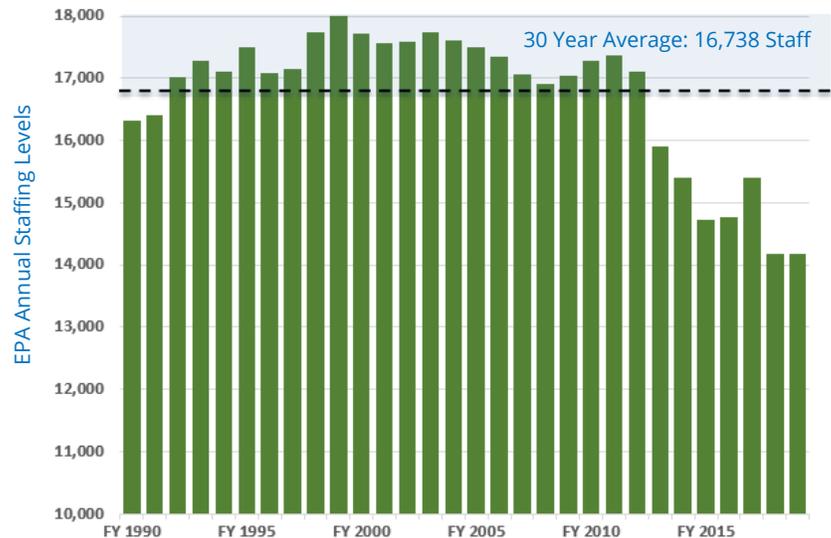
emissions. The limits were [predicted to cost](#) nearly \$9.6 billion per year but have now been fully implemented for less than a quarter of that, barely \$2 billion per year.

The [cuts](#) to EPA's workforce have especially undermined the agency's ability to protect human health and the environment by draining off skilled professionals who are essential to making environmental protection work.

The long erosion of EPA funding has impacted the agency's most basic and pivotal program capacities, colloquially termed "core" programs. The erosion has taken the following forms:

- ❖ Regulatory and enforcement activities funded through the EPA Environmental Programs and Management (EPM) account. The EPM budget (excluding geographic programs) in 2010 was \$2.38 billion (\$2.82 billion in real dollars), 31% more than its 2020 enacted level of \$2.15 billion.
- ❖ Core science activities funded through the Science and Technology (S&T) Account. The S&T account received \$0.846 billion in 2010, (\$1.00 billion in real dollars), 40% more than its 2020 enacted level of \$0.716 billion.
- ❖ Activities that implement or support EPA or state core environmental regulatory activities funded through categorical grants in the State and Tribal Assistance Grants account. Funding for EPA categorical grants in 2010 was \$1.12 billion (\$1.33 billion in real dollars), 23% more than its 2020 enacted level of \$1.08 billion.
- ❖ EPA regulatory and response activities funded through the Superfund account. Superfund received \$1.3 billion in 2010 (\$1.54 billion in real dollars), 29% more than the enacted 2020 level of \$1.185 billion.

EPA Workforce, 1990-2019



Source: EPA, "EPA's Budget and Spending."

EPA Budget Background: Cuts in support for state and tribal environmental protection.

States and tribes need EPA support more than ever just to carry out their essential functions. States are core agency partners in protecting public health and the environment, and several EPA statutes authorize the agency to treat tribes in the same manner as states to the extent it is appropriate and practicable to do so. Helping states and tribes protect public health and the environment is important to ensuring that our nation’s environmental protection system can function effectively.

Under our federal system, states and tribes are the first line of defense against air, water, waste, and other pollution affecting their residents and do much of the work to address such pollution. Many federal environmental laws treat EPA and the states and tribes as partners, with EPA generally establishing national standards to ensure clean air, water, and land. States and tribes have the primary role in implementing those standards through such measures as issuing permits, carrying out inspections, and enforcing laws and regulations.

EPA support is critical to state and tribal environmental programs. Tribes rely heavily on EPA funding, and states depend on EPA for more than [25% of their operating budgets](#). And state environmental programs have been facing serious resource challenges for at least a decade, in some cases with dramatic and sustained cutbacks, even before the current pandemic. During the last decade, [40 states reduced environmental staffing](#), eliminating a total of 5,700 environmental jobs. Over half the states have cut their environmental program budgets, with a third of the states cutting budgets by 20% and the hardest hit budgets decreasing by a third or more.¹ The current pandemic will further stretch state resources.

Meanwhile, the EPA categorical grants program has suffered substantial cuts in current dollars, under the same formula of “level” funding that has negatively affected agency core programs. Funding for EPA categorical grants in 2010 was \$1.12 billion (\$1.33 billion in real dollars), 23% more than the 2020 level of \$1.08 billion.

¹ This excludes California, which added 1,255 pollution control staff. Overall cuts were 4,400, but if California’s numbers are not included, the remaining states for which data is available shed a total of 5,705 positions, about 14% of their total environmental workforce.

Participants in the EPN Workgroup

Increasing Funding to Protect Public Health and the Environment

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