

## **EFFECTS OF A GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN AT EPA** **September 27, 2023**

If members of the U.S. House of Representatives fail to agree on a spending bill or a continuing resolution to keep the government open by midnight on September 30, 2023, a partial shutdown of the government will begin on October 1. EPA might be able to operate for a short time on funding remaining from the previous fiscal year but would need to shut down when those funds run out. According to EPA's 2021 shutdown contingency [plan](#), the agency intended to furlough about 13,000 employees out of the 14,283 then on board—the vast majority of EPA employees. Government shutdowns are very disruptive, requiring the diversion of resources to plan and prepare for them. EPA preparations have been underway for some time.

Previous shutdowns provide some guidance on what happens if EPA shuts down. During a shutdown, employees usually come in for up to four hours to close down their work. After that, most employees, excluding a few who are allowed to do limited work during a shutdown, cannot work. Some employees are allowed to work for limited purposes. Most daily work simply comes to a grinding halt during a shutdown.

A shutdown at EPA would stop:

- Most activities related to hazardous waste cleanups under the national **Superfund** program
- **Inspections** to ensure regulated activities are being done safely and lawfully
- **Enforcement** work such as case development, and administrative or court hearings
- Approvals for the importation of **pesticide products**, even if products awaiting approval back up in the ports
- Reviews or approvals for sale of **toxic substances**
- Responses to **Freedom of Information Act** requests
- Processing **state grants** and **auditing** how federal money is being used
- Issuance of **federal permits**, although states issue many permits that would not be directly affected

In a **public health emergency** EPA can respond, but mobilizing furloughed staff takes time and could delay a response.

During a shutdown, the public is literally shut out of most contact with government employees who provide invaluable assistance to thousands of people each day. Phones are placed on voicemail, and critical questions go unanswered. *How do I renew my EPA lead paint removal certification? Who do I call about someone illegally dumping tires in a nearby stream?* Deadlines are missed for small grant applications, community meetings are canceled or go forward without EPA present, and compliance assistance to the regulated community stops.

Employees cannot be paid during a shutdown and may not receive back pay at all. In the aftermath of previous shutdowns, Congress provided full back pay for all federal employees, but payments are never certain until the shutdown is resolved. If a shutdown goes on for an extended period, employees—especially those at the lower end of the pay scale—might struggle to pay their bills.

Shutdowns cause huge uncertainty for federal employees, put people's health and the environment at risk, and are a tremendous waste of taxpayer dollars.

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