**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:**

**FROM:**

**RE:** This Black History Month, We Commemorate Environmental Justice Milestones and Call On the Trump Administration to Stop Their Attacks on the Health of African American Communities

**DATE:** [February 1, 2019]

Over the past two years in office, President Trump and his Administration have continuously failed African American communities. By moving to roll back lifesaving climate and public health protections, Acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler in particular has undermined a healthy future for our country’s most vulnerable populations, including communities of color.

During Black History Month this year, America will mark several major milestones and anniversaries related to African American history. In April, it will be 400 years since enslaved Africans were brought to North America. This month also marks 25 years since Executive Order 12898 was signed by President Clinton requiring all federal agencies to make environmental justice part of their missions, so that the challenges African Americans still face are taken into account across the federal government.

**As you cover Black History Month, please consider including the Trump administration’s continuous attacks on environmental and public health safeguards that refuse to build on the progress made to protect African Americans. We should be moving forward, not backwards in addressing the needs of communities of color.**

On February 11, 1994, President Bill Clinton held an Oval Office event to celebrate [Executive Order 12898](https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-executive-order-12898-federal-actions-address-environmental-justice), an action meant to address the intersectionality of civil rights and environmental justice. It represented progress by the federal government in addressing “disproportionately adverse human health and environmental effects of its programs, policies and activities on minority and low-income communities.” Twenty-five years later under the Trump administration, progress has paused—marred by rollbacks and a dangerous disregard for communities of color, the environment, and climate change.

**Environmental Justice: EPA Definition Does Not Match Reality of the Agency Under Trump and Wheeler**

* While the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) [defines environmental justice](https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice) as ”the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies,” the reality is that the Trump administration – led by Acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler – has broken this promise to the communities it’s responsible for protecting.
* President Trump and his EPA —first under disgraced former Administrator Scott Pruitt and now Andrew Wheeler—[cut the EPA’s budget](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2018/02/12/trump-budget-seeks-23-percent-cut-at-epa-would-eliminate-dozens-of-programs/?noredirect=on), [shuttered the environmental justice office](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/03/09/epas-environmental-justice-leader-steps-down-amid-white-house-plans-to-dismantle-program/?utm_term=.8d9af25b8559), [scrubbed climate change from the agency’s website](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/climate/epa-climate-change.html), and is quickly rolling back protections that will put public health at risk.

**Rolling Back Regulations: How Donald Trump and Andrew Wheeler are Attacking Protections that Protect our Health and Wallets**

* Instead of advancing environmental justice by offering solutions to protect health, combat climate change, and achieve equitable outcomes, the Trump administration continues to do the bidding of corporate polluters by dismantling lifesaving health and climate protections.
* By [rolling back the clean car standards](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/02/climate/trump-auto-emissions-california.html), [gutting the Clean Power Plan](https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/20/climate/epa-clean-power-rollback.html), and [advancing a “Poison Plan”](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/12/28/mercury-rule-rollback-epa-plan-could-help-weaken-other-regulations/2379874002/) to dismantle protections on mercury pollution released from power plants – will impact communities of color first and worst, and puts dirty industry allies ahead of our health.

**Clean Car Standards:** The health of low-income families and communities of color is disproportionately damaged by tailpipe pollution, and rolling back America’s clean car standards means denying them the promise of cleaner air, healthier communities, and longer lives.

* A [growing body of evidence](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/oct/15/study-air-pollution-traffic-low-birthweight) links air pollution from the transportation sector to low birth weight and impaired fetal brain development, with lasting health and cognitive impacts.
* **Pollution from cars is especially harmful for African Americans, who** [**suffer disproportionately**](https://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/outdoor/air-pollution/disparities.html) **from air pollution.**
* Even EPA scientists recognize the health impact to Black lives. Their [recent study](https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/375289-epa-scientists-find-emissions-greater-impact-low-income-communities) found that when it comes to particulate air pollution – which is linked to premature death in people with heart or lung disease, irregular heartbeats and decreased lung function — the health burden on African Americans is 54 percent higher than the health burden on the American population overall.
* What’s more, slashing money-saving standards that save consumers an average of [$3,200 per car and $4,800 per truck](https://advocacy.consumerreports.org/press_release/fuel-economy-savings-report/) over the lifetimes of their vehicles, amounts to a direct attack on families who can’t afford to pay more at the pump.

**Clean Power Plan:** By rolling back America’s first and only federal limits on carbon pollution from power plants, Trump and Wheeler are recklessly exposing millions of Americans to more pollution and would place the health and safety of our communities at risk – especially communities of color and vulnerable communities who are disproportionately impacted by pollution.

* The Clean Power Plan [is projected](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/epa-admits-new-emissions-plan-could-cause-1400-premature-deaths-a-year/) to prevent 90,000 child asthma attacks, 300,000 missed work and school days, and up to 3,600 premature deaths annually by 2030 according to EPA estimates.
* Repealing the Clean Power Plan means more sick kids, more expensive hospital visits, and thousands of premature deaths that could have been prevented – and could lead to more intense and destructive severe weather events like Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.
* **Black children are** [**4.5 times more likely to be hospitalized**](https://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/omh/browse.aspx?lvl=4&lvlid=15) **for asthma, and 10 times more likely to die from asthma than white children.**
* **83 percent of African Americans** [**support the Clean Power Plan**](http://www.greenforall.org/poll_shows_african_americans_strongly_back_climate_action)**, and** [**more than 10,000**](http://hiphopcaucus.org/urgent-impact-of-climate-change-on-black-communities-should-cause-republican-defeat-black-congressman-says/) **Black clergy members from around the country signed a statement supporting the Clean Power Plan, calling climate change a “moral issue.”**

**Mercury and Air Toxics Standards:** Trump and Wheeler are moving forward with their “Poison Plan” that attacks Americans’ health, targeting restrictions on dangerous mercury and toxic pollution from power plants.

* Mercury pollution is particularly hazardous, endangering pregnant women, children and other vulnerable communities causing severe brain damage to those exposed to it.
* **A** [**recent analysis**](https://www.americanprogress.org/press/release/2018/12/18/464375/release-nearly-82-percent-reduction-mercury-emissions-u-s-power-plants-since-2011-cap-analysis-finds/) **from the Center for American Progress found that current mercury protections have reduced mercury pollution from power plants by over 80 percent between 2011 – 2017.**
* The [EPA estimates](https://www.epa.gov/mats/healthier-americans) that the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards protections prevent up to 11,000 premature deaths, 130,000 asthma attacks, and 4,700 heart attacks each year.
* **A** [report](https://www.naacp.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Fumes-Across-the-Fence-Line_NAACP-and-CATF-Study.pdf) **from the NAACP and the Clean Air Task Force found that African Americans face disproportionate risk of health problems from pollution. More than one million African-Americans live within half a mile of an oil and gas operation, and more than 6.7 million live in a county that is home to a refinery.**

Today, the fight for environmental justice continues with greater urgency. As [the fourth National Climate Assessment](https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/), which was released by the Trump administration and backed by over 300 scientists, points out that “climate change is already a clear and present danger to the health and wealth of Americans.” That means the most vulnerable populations face heightened risks and dangers as they confront additional barriers for coping with extreme weather and other climate-related activities.

During Black History Month, the best way the EPA can commemorate the 25th anniversary of the environmental justice executive order is by upholding its mission of protecting public health and the environment in which all people live, learn, work and play.

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