



## Deepest Cuts: Repairing Health Monitoring Programs Slashed Under the Bush Administration

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When it comes to protecting public health from dangerous contaminants, the Bush Administration has left a legacy of dismal failure. We rely on the government to monitor contaminants and hazardous residues to ensure that our food, water, air, communities, and consumer products are safe. For decades, federal agencies charged with safeguarding health and the environment have tracked pollution, required industry reporting, and monitored disease rates. These programs provide the foundation for all health and environmental protection. Without adequate monitoring, the public, the scientific community, and the government are unaware of the hazards around us. New NRDC research shows that the Bush Administration has dangerously slashed federal environmental and health monitoring programs.

During the eight years of the Bush Administration, the federal government has quietly eliminated or crippled more than a dozen essential monitoring programs. Budget cuts, restructuring, program termination, and removal of industry reporting requirements have been steadily undermining or eliminating the information that alerts us to problems in our air, water, food, or communities. Programs that directly track human health have also been slashed, creating gaps in our information about infectious disease outbreaks, chemical exposures in people, and chronic disease.

### Environmental Health Protections Must Be Restored

NRDC evaluated the current state of federal environmental and health monitoring programs at the end of the Bush Administration in five key areas: **air**, **water**, **food safety**, **toxic substances**, and **human health**. We found a disturbing and pervasive pattern of program and funding cuts that make it impossible for programs to fulfill their monitoring role.



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Some of the worst examples include:

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will not have enough information to enforce the new air standard for lead, since hundreds of communities near lead polluters will not have testing of their air quality and the lead monitoring network has been cut by half over the past decade.

- The Bush Administration has proposed to eliminate requirements that “Factory Farms” and similar facilities report the air pollution from animal waste. This proposal may be finalized before January, even though many such facilities pollute the air more than large industrial factories.

- The EPA decided to no longer require drinking water systems to monitor for two dangerous pollutants—perchlorate and MTBE. Previous monitoring had revealed both pollutants to be widespread in drinking water supplies. Perchlorate interferes with thyroid gland function, and MTBE is a suspected carcinogen.

- The EPA finalized a rule that will exempt companies from reporting some or all of their toxic pollution. Several states are challenging this rule in court.

- Budget cuts at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) will devastate two programs that test groundwater and surface water for pesticides, heavy metals, pharmaceuticals, hormone disruptors, and other toxic chemicals.

- A USGS program that monitors stream flow also suffered crippling budget cuts, even though climate change will result in more flooding and a greater need for accurate and up-to-date stream flow information.

- The already tight budget for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) program that tracks food-related illness was cut by more than \$2 million, at a time when some foodborne illness outbreaks have been increasing.

- The CDC Biomonitoring Program, which measures pollution in people, has been cut by nearly 20 percent since 2002.

In addition to these devastating cuts, numerous other important monitoring programs have been left to wither with insufficient resources and without the necessary budget increases to cover rising costs. If this decline is not reversed soon, we can expect alarming and belated discoveries of contaminants in our food, water, and household products. Even worse, many health hazards will remain undiscovered and unaddressed, posing a long-term health risk to ourselves and our families.

### Recommendations for Restoring Strong Public Health Protections

There is a simple solution for reinstating the regulations that protect our public health: the programs proposed for elimination should be retained, the budgets should be restored, and the reporting requirements for industry should be reinstated. These programs are not expensive; restoring slashed budgets would require approximately \$133 million—or 0.02 percent of the recent \$700 billion bank bailout. What’s more, monitoring programs pay for themselves by preventing pollution and disease and by identifying problems that need to be addressed before they cost our health care system and taxpayers many more millions of dollars. For example, one study estimated the contribution of environmental pollution to lead poisoning, asthma, cancer, and neurobehavioral disorders in children as costing almost \$55 billion a year.<sup>1</sup>

The systematic Bush Administration cutbacks documented in this report will keep us in the dark about threats to our health while at the same time making it easier to pollute because of fewer requirements to document emissions. And the examples contained in this report may be just the tip of the iceberg; a system-wide accounting is needed to ensure the adequacy of environmental and health monitoring. Protecting public health requires immediate action to restore these comprehensive monitoring programs to test our environment and strong pollution reporting systems to keep contamination in check.

<sup>1</sup> Landrigan PJ, Schechter CB, Lipton JM, et al. Environmental pollutants and disease in American children: Estimates of morbidity, mortality, and costs for lead poisoning, asthma, cancer, and developmental disabilities. *Environ Health Perspect* 110(7):721-728, 2002.

### Other Monitoring Programs Requiring Restoration

- Monitoring pesticide levels in urban waterways
- Monitoring pollutants in stormwater run-off
- Recording levels of pesticide use on farms
- Testing fish for unsafe mercury levels
- Testing food for pesticide residues
- Monitoring honey bee colony health
- Monitoring and assessing health threats at contaminated sites
- Tracking illnesses from hazardous substance releases
- Performing environmental justice assessments
- Testing consumer products for safety
- Tracking illnesses and health status in the U.S. population
- Tracking occupational asthma and pesticide illnesses
- Tracking and linking environmental exposures and health effects

