

## EPA

### Senior official quits, decrying 'triumph of myth over truth'

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U.S. EPA's head of the Office of Water's Office of Science and Technology, Elizabeth Southerland, has resigned because of the Trump administration's policies. NRDC/Flickr

A senior U.S. EPA official is resigning her post today, saying in a scathing exit memo that the Trump administration has led to "the temporary triumph of myth over truth."

Elizabeth "Betsy" Southerland worked at EPA for 30 years, most recently directing the Office of Water's Office of Science and Technology.



Elizabeth Southerland. EPA

In the [exit memo](#), released by **Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility**, Southerland said EPA had often been "the guiding light to make the 'right thing' happen for the greater good" throughout her career.

Southerland, who received a Presidential Rank Award of Distinguished Executive in 2015, said it all changed when Administrator Scott Pruitt took the helm.

Southerland describes Pruitt as perverting the notion of "cooperative federalism" — a favorite buzzword of the administrator, who has said he wants to roll back some federal regulations in order to allow more involvement from the states.

Southerland said EPA has "always followed a cooperative federalism approach," setting environmental standards for local regulators to implement.

That model of cooperative federalism depends on EPA providing funding to states and tribes to help implement regulations. The White House has proposed cutting such funding.

Those cuts, combined with planned rollbacks of more than 30 regulations, are "not a cooperative federalism approach," wrote Southerland.

"It is an industry deregulation approach based on abandonment of the polluter pays principle that underlies all environmental statutes and regulations," she said.

EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox wrote in an email, "It's hard to believe that Elizabeth Southerland is retiring because of a budget proposal and not because she's eligible for her government pension."

Southerland slammed Pruitt's EPA for launching a "repeal, replace, modify initiative" for regulations. She expressed particular concern over attempts to postpone deadlines for a 2015 rule curbing toxic metals in power plants' wastewater discharges (see related story).

"Any environmental protection rule promulgated at any time in the past may be repealed by this administration, as well as any science or technical document ever published by EPA," wrote Southerland.

She also described President Trump's executive order requiring that agencies repeal two regulations for every new one as "a real Sophie's choice for public health agencies like EPA."

She said, "Should EPA repeal two existing rules protecting infants from neurotoxins in order to promulgate a new rule protecting adults from a newly discovered liver toxin?"

"Faced with such painful choices, the best possible outcome for the American people would be regulatory paralysis where no new rules are released so that existing protections remain in place."

Southerland ends her memo on a somewhat hopeful note, saying EPA has often had to combat myths that its regulations of everything from nonpoint sources of pollution to Superfund laws are impediments to business, but the agency always eventually comes out on top.

"The truth is there is NO war on coal, there is NO economic crisis caused by environmental protection, and climate change IS caused by man's activities," she writes.

"It may take a few years and even an environmental disaster," she said, "but I am confident that Congress and the courts will eventually restore all the environmental protections repealed by this administration because the majority of the American people recognize that this protection of public health and safety is right and it is just."

Wilcox said, "We wish Elizabeth Southerland the best in her retirement, and the EPA will continue to re-focus on our core mission of protecting our air, land and water."

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