

EPA

Watchdog spotlights enforcement in questions for Pruitt

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Published: Tuesday, January 10, 2017

A watchdog group is calling on Scott Pruitt, President-elect Donald Trump's pick for U.S. EPA administrator, to toughen up the agency's enforcement of anti-pollution laws.

In a [letter](#) to Sens. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) and Tom Carper (D-Del.), the Environment and Public Works Committee chairman and ranking member, respectively, **Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility** said the group had questions over whether Pruitt would weaken EPA's enforcement.

"I am writing to urge that you question Mr. Pruitt to determine what he thinks the proper role for U.S. EPA should be, especially with respect to enforcement and oversight of state-delegated programs," said Jeff Ruch, PEER's executive director, in the letter.

"In particular," the letter says, "our concern is whether as EPA Administrator he will further weaken the enforcement of basic anti-pollution laws protecting our air, water and soil."

As Oklahoma's Republican attorney general, Pruitt has often battled with EPA, suing the agency over several controversial regulations, including the Clean Power Plan. He has said in the past that there is a role for EPA in enforcing environmental law, though those prior statements "leave a lot of ambiguity," according to Ruch.

Ruch noted that enforcement against polluters has dropped at EPA in recent years under the Obama administration. The agency's own data show there has been a steady decrease in the number of criminal cases being opened between fiscal 2012 and fiscal 2016 ([Greenwire](#), Dec. 20, 2016).

PEER urged the senators to ask Pruitt 10 questions as part of his confirmation process, including how he would stop a repeat of the Flint, Mich., drinking water crisis as EPA chief and whether he pursued polluters with vigor in his own state.

"You have been criticized for compiling a lax environment enforcement record in Oklahoma. Can you name a single case where you as Attorney General pursued vigorous prosecution of pollution violations?" said the letter.

Pruitt's nomination has been one of the more contentious picks for the incoming Trump administration.

Yesterday, protests across the country were held against Pruitt and other nominees in order to block their confirmation. Pruitt's nomination, however, is inching forward, with a "tentative" hearing date of Jan. 18, according to Barrasso ([E&E Daily](#), Jan. 10).

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