



Institute for
Policy Integrity
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

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NEW REPORT ANALYZES WEAKENING OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The Covid-19 pandemic has led federal, state, and municipal policymakers to adopt a number of measures that suspended, delayed, or relaxed a variety of environmental safeguards. While some of these policy shifts had straightforward justifications, others lacked a clear rationale, raising concerns that the pandemic might have been used as a means for providing unnecessary concessions to favored industries. Some of these measures still remain in place, including pipeline safety inspection changes and deferred enforcement of several environmental rules.

A [new report from the Institute for Policy Integrity at NYU School of Law](#) analyzes these pandemic-related policy shifts and their impacts on public health and the environment. It also recommends criteria that agencies can use to determine when to end ongoing policy concessions, so that public safeguards can be restored as quickly as possible. Finally, the report provides guidance on how agencies can increase transparency about these actions, counteract detrimental effects, and preemptively create guidelines to improve responses in a future emergency.

Three of the most common categories of pandemic-related policy changes involved relaxed pollution monitoring and reporting requirements, reductions to fossil fuel companies' royalty payments, and changes to municipal waste programs, such as suspensions of recycling initiatives. While a lack of agency disclosure and data limitations hinder a comprehensive analysis of many of these measures, the broad effects of many policy shifts are clear. Decreased oversight likely resulted in greater pollution, including a 14% spike in levels of particulate matter emissions in some areas after EPA announced a temporary policy relaxing pollution enforcement requirements. And concessions to fossil fuel companies created incentives for further resource extraction while reducing revenue for federal and state governments.

The new report, ***Policy Shifts in a Pandemic: Assessing the Environmental Laws and Policies Weakened in Response to Covid-19***, is available at: <https://policyintegrity.org/publications/detail/policy-shifts-in-a-pandemic>

The Institute for Policy Integrity has tracked pandemic-related environmental policy shifts in [its public database](#), which it has maintained since April 2020.

The authors are available for interviews on these issues.

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[The Institute for Policy Integrity](#) at New York University School of Law is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to improving the quality of government decisionmaking. The institute produces original scholarly research in the fields of economics, law, and regulatory policy; and advocates for reform before courts, legislatures, and executive agencies.