



# Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

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President Donald Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

While you are not a scientist, your administration will have to set policy governing federal science. In particular, your administration will have to take a stand on the issues of scientific integrity and informational transparency.

On behalf of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), a service organization for public servants at all levels of government, I am writing to urge you to strengthen – not weaken – current federal policies against political manipulation or suppression of science.

Last week, Sigma Xi, the scientific research honor society, wrote urging you to maintain a posture of scientific transparency. I will not repeat the substantive reasons they offered you. Instead, I want to convey two other points arguing for the same conclusion:

1. You have a chance to finish and improve upon a task your predecessor failed to complete; and
2. A policy of scientific censorship is doomed to fail and will create needless backlash.

On the first point, it is clear that federal scientific integrity policies are at a crossroads. An assessment of these policies commissioned by the White House Office of Science & Technology Policy underscored how little has been accomplished since a 2009 presidential directive on the topic. While 24 agencies with major scientific programs have adopted some form of a policy, the December 2016 OSTP review found –

- Not all are complete, failing to address key elements mandated in the 2009 presidential directive;

- Some are missing definitions for key terms, such as “scientific integrity” or “scientific misconduct,” others take differing approaches and lack uniformity even in who is covered; and
- There was no effort to find out which policies worked or to encourage adoption of best practices.

These gaps were underscored by outgoing Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz’s posting the agency’s first detailed scientific integrity policy in his last week in office. This belated policy declared that Energy Department scientists could communicate without political filters but omitted any enforcement mechanism for this new right.

At least that agency was moving forward; in late 2014 the Interior Department moved backwards, weakening its policy after scientists’ complaints of misconduct by managers began to be validated. Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is fighting a lawsuit aiming at strengthening its policy and ending a gag order forbidding scientists from creating controversy.

Even more disturbing is the Environmental Protection Agency, which despite being at the epicenter of a national debate on scientific quality, epitomizes this problem by fielding an especially feeble policy that offers little security for either its scientists or their work.

In short, your predecessor only established a beachhead on scientific integrity with little impact on actual agency practices.

Secondly, attempts to politically alter scientific results usually misfire, as amply illustrated by exposés of ham-handed efforts during the George W. Bush administration. Similarly, your transition has experienced the adverse reaction from initial word that your “landing team” would screen EPA and other agency science on a “case-by-case” basis. It is our understanding that these words were walked back the day after they were uttered.

Simply put, administration attempts to manipulate science to fit its official talking points will inescapably fail, automatically be leaked and subject your White House to a daily drip-drip-drip of bad, off-message news coverage. The only way to quell the quagmire of unending controversy on issue after issue is to establish strong, clear and uniform guidelines ensuring a transparent paper trail and allowing scientific information to be freely shared.

Mr. President, we urge you to make lemonade out from an entire lemon orchard of scientific conflict in your path. You can do this only by championing openness as your official policy regarding science.

Sincerely,

Jeff Ruch  
Executive Director