

White House clears EPA rule limiting science

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On the last day of the year, the White House regulatory review shop cleared EPA's controversial plan to restrict the use of scientific research used at the agency.

EPA chief Andrew Wheeler is expected to announce the final rule as early as tomorrow.

The rule, "Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science," has been a priority at the agency for years, with former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt first introducing the idea in 2018.

Long known as the "secret science" proposal, the rule has been among the agency's most controversial efforts because it could hamstring a range of future regulations, from air pollution to water policies.

Observers expect the final rule to force EPA to give more weight to scientific research in which the data is public and can be reproduced. It also is expected to include a

provision that allows the administrator to grant exemptions, which critics fear could lead to the further politicization of science.

Late last week, agency spokesperson James Hewitt said Americans "deserve transparency and access to data that determine regulatory decisions and in a way that protects the privacy of individuals and other confidential information."

The rule is just one of several regulations the Trump administration is hustling to wrap up before leaving office Jan. 20. Others in the environmental space have included cost-benefit analyses for air regulations and air quality standards for ozone and soot.

Critics in the public health and environmental community have alleged that the science transparency rule will weaken protections in the middle of a pandemic.

Already, Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.), ranking member on the Environment and Public Works Committee, has issued a press release condemning the move, calling the rule "one last gasp of scientific denial."

"Amid an ongoing public health crisis — a time when accessing the latest scientific research and embracing scientific advancements is a critical function of protecting human health — the Trump EPA is trying to limit the use of scientific data, even data that could be used to address the growing link between exposure to air pollution and adverse outcomes of COVID-19," said Carper. "It's as absurd as it sounds."