

# The Trump Administration's Climate Nihilism

BY

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Trump administration officials now admit that climate disaster is real and on its way soon — they just don't care.

When it comes to terrifying dystopian realities, it's hard to top our current world's combination of extreme wealth and income inequality, with an impending ecological collapse that's being entirely ignored by those in power. But it could get always get worse.

What if, for instance, the wealthy and powerful ruling elite of arguably the world's last remaining superpower acknowledged the truth of the environmental disaster that faces the world, but decided they simply didn't care? What if this small but powerful cabal of nihilists determined, after spending decades denying the problem and refusing to do anything about it, that it was now simply too late to act, and they would rather gobble up the world's wealth and resources during humanity's twilight so they can have the time of their lives before it all fell apart?

Terrifyingly, this appears to be the direction in which we're heading.

Last week, the *Washington Post* put out a report on the Trump administration's draft environmental impact statement, issued in July by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). The impact statement made a startling assumption: that, based on our current trajectory, the planet is set to warm by 7 degrees Fahrenheit (around 4 degrees Celsius) by the end of the century, an apocalyptic scenario that would see ecosystems destroyed, cities plunged underwater, and the deaths of billions of people around the world, if not the gradual extinction of humanity itself.

The impact statement also made an even more startling assumption: that this is almost certainly going to happen, so there's little point in doing much about it.

The impact statement was meant to justify Trump's July decision to freeze Obama's fuel-efficiency standards for cars and light trucks. These standards could not "solely" achieve the emissions cuts that are desperately needed, it stated, so Trump's decision to abandon them was the right one. It went on to argue that preventing the climate catastrophe it predicts "would require the economy and the vehicle fleet to substantially move away from the use of fossil fuels, which is not currently technologically feasible or economically practicable." It's too hard, so let's not bother.

The coterie of hard-right radicals who run the Trump administration should no longer be accused of being climate denialists. As the *Post* itself points out, the administration's agencies have put out numerous reports demonstrating that climate change is man-made and a threat, which the White House has strategized over how to discount, electing to simply "ignore" them. The administration has also slashed funding for global climate change research, directed its science agencies to ignore climate change, scrubbed climate data from government web pages, and taken many other steps to stifle scientific research and education. And now this.

These are not the actions of a group of people who think they're intellectually in the right. The *Post* calls it evidence of "deep contradictions" and "inconsistency" of the administration's approach to climate change.

That's far too generous. This is not climate denialism; it's climate nihilism.

Just as Exxon Mobil stumbled upon evidence for man-made climate change in the 1980s but chose to mislead the public about it for decades so it could keep making as much money as possible, the powerful radicals who run the Trump administration have essentially decided, after doing everything they could for decades to prevent action on the issue, that the world is now beyond saving. "The analysis assumes the planet's fate is already sealed," as the *Post* puts it.

The prospect that this worldview has infected a small but powerful cabal within the American ruling elite is something new — and terrifying. Willfully blinding oneself to scientific evidence for the sake of profit is one thing. Calculating that the ship is going to sink no matter what, so you may as well have a good time on the way down, is another.

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