



# Why members of two of EPA's influential science advisory committees were let go

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The EPA's acting director let go of members of two of the agency's influential advisory committees on Tuesday. In an email, James Payne said they could reapply for their positions.

*Justin Sullivan/Getty Images*

Members of two of the Environmental Protection Agency's most influential advisory committees, tasked with providing independent scientific guidance to the head of the agency, found out Tuesday evening that they had been ousted. An email sent to members of the EPA's Science Advisory Board (SAB) and the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC) informed them that the membership of both groups is being "reset."

Acting EPA administrator James Payne wrote in the email, viewed by NPR, that "EPA is working to update these federal advisory committees to ensure that the agency receives scientific advice consistent with its legal obligations to advance our core mission."

The decision comes in the wake of [dozens of executive orders](#) signed by President Trump during his first week in office that affect many aspects of federal policy, from immigration to climate and energy priorities.

A request for nominations to refill the SAB and CASAC will be announced in the coming weeks, according to the email.

"I'm disappointed," says Barbara Turpin, a former member of CASAC and an air pollution expert at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and one of the committee members let go on Tuesday. But, she adds, "I'm not surprised, because this happened last time Trump was president."

During the first Trump administration, then-EPA administrator Andrew Wheeler dismissed CASAC members and [dismantled panels](#) tasked with reviewing science about air pollution. In 2021, during the Biden administration, then-EPA administrator Michael Regan [replaced members from both science advisory panels](#), saying the move was necessary to "reverse deficiencies" in the advisory process during the first Trump term.

In an email, a press officer for the EPA said Tuesday's move "seeks to reverse the politicization of SAB and CASAC made by the previous Administration."

## **A history of science advice**

The advisory committees were established in the 1970s. They are tasked with providing independent advice to the EPA's administrator, summarizing the best available science to help inform the agency's policy. Since a [1977 amendment to the Clean Air Act](#), the [Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee](#), for example, takes input from panels of experts, primarily academic scientists. They summarize that input and provide guidance on the agency's National Ambient Air Quality Standards, which regulate the country's air pollution.

The committee recently suggested the agency tighten standards for fine particle pollution, called PM 2.5. That pollution comes from many sources, including fossil fuel combustion and wildfire smoke, and has been linked to health risks, including a higher risk of cardiovascular problems and earlier onset of dementia. After the committee's recommendations, the agency [adopted more stringent limits](#) in 2024—the first update to the rules in more than a decade.

CASAC was beginning to work on recommendations for updated standards on ozone, says Mary Rice, a pulmonologist and air pollution expert at Harvard University who was, until Tuesday, a member of CASAC.

The Clean Air Act requires that the EPA set national air quality standards to "protect public health with an adequate margin of safety," she says. "I am concerned about whether the U.S. EPA will engage an advisory committee of scientists to ensure that the margin of safety is met for children, people with heart or lung disease, and older adults," she says.

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