23 April 2018

Scott Pruitt
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

On behalf of the American Geophysical Union (AGU) and its 60,000 scientist members, I am writing to express concerns about planned policy changes at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding transparency and accuracy of scientific information. We urge you to evaluate the unintended consequences of these policies and reconsider them.

Recent reports indicate that EPA is planning to implement new policies that would require the agency to use only scientific data and information that is publicly available when considering science in rule-making. The legislation this policy is based on, the HONEST Act[1], has received significant opposition from the scientific community and other organizations because of the potential for this policy to exclude data vital to informed decision-making.[2]

AGU is fully committed and would be willing to provide assistance to efforts to ensure that scientific information is communicated openly with policymakers and the public. However, it is critical that such scientific information undergo the peer review process, which remains the gold standard of academic achievement. Despite suggestions to the contrary,[3] the peer review process affords the type of informed discourse necessary for the objectivity, rigor, and legitimacy of scientific information.

The Congressional Budget Office estimated that implementing a secret science policy like the one proposed by EPA would cost between an estimated $5 million over five years to $250 million annually.[4] At a time when the Administration is proposing significant cuts to EPA funding, this policy would become an unnecessary burden on the agency and further hamstring its ability to protect public health and the environment. In general, to exclude vital scientific information from consideration would put our local communities' health and well-being at risk.

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[1] H.R. 1430, sponsored by Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX-21), passed the House on 29 March 2017.
[2] https://sciencepolicy.agu.org/files/2013/07/AAAS-Secret-Science-letter-McCarthy-2015.pdf
[3] http://dailycaller.com/2018/03/19/epa-scott-pruitt-secret-science/
[4] https://www.cbo.gov/publication/50025

AGU 100
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Of additional concern to AGU are reports that EPA has directed its employees to use talking points regarding climate change that are contrary to the robust scientific data and the consensus of scientists across the nation and the world.[5] The reported guidance requires EPA employees to emphasize that "clear gaps remain including our understanding of the role of human activity and what we can do about it." This is not only inaccurate, but also jeopardizes the ability of communities to respond appropriately to protect people's health and well-being from challenges related to climate change.

AGU stands with the scientific community[6] regarding the scientific consensus that climate change is occurring and is primarily driven by human activities.[7] The data that supports this conclusion is not only strong but growing all the time. Failing to acknowledge and inform the public about this fact, as well as the ways in which the public can mitigate the effects and build resiliency is scientifically misleading, dangerous, and against the very mission of EPA. We as a nation need to ensure that we are addressing the pressing issues facing our communities by using and disseminating accurate, peer-reviewed and up-to-date scientific information.

AGU would welcome the opportunity to work with you on these critical issues and ensure that science can continue to appropriately inform decision-making and benefit the American public.

Respectfully,

Christine W McEntee

Christine McEntee
Executive Director/CEO
American Geophysical Union

[5] https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/the-energy-202/2018/03/29/the-energy-202-scott-pruitt-s-climate-message-is-now-official-epa-guidance/5abbfd3630fb042a378a2f23/?utm_term=.272c755ae673
[6] https://sciencepolicy.agu.org/files/2013/07/2016climateletter6-28-16.pdf
[7] https://sciencepolicy.agu.org/files/2018/02/AGU-Climate-Change-Position-Statement-Final-2013.pdf

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