Environmental Data & Governance Initiative
Website Monitoring Report

EPA Discontinues Updates to Climate Change Websites

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Report writers: Eric Nost
Technical and Content reviewer: Gretchen Gehrke
Additional contributions: EDGI's Website Monitoring Team

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Overview

Since April 2017, EPA has substituted their climate change subdomain with a splash page stating that these sites were being updated to reflect the views of the Trump administration. In October 2018, EPA modified that splash page to remove any mention of "updating" and to simply state, "We want to help you find what you are looking for." EPA also removed links to the outgoing administration snapshot (January 19, 2017 snapshot) of the climate change website main page and to the press release about the initial removal of the climate change websites.

Description of Changes

In late April 2017, EPA removed its climate change subdomain from public access, redirecting incoming traffic for at least 80 URLs, including epa.gov/climatechange, to a new page: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/signpost/cc.html This page stated that the climate change subdomain was "being updated" to reflect the priorities of the then-new administration. It pointed visitors to a snapshot of epa.gov/climatechange from the last day of the Obama Administration, at https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climatechange_.html. On October 18, 2018, EPA modified the redirect page, removing the statement that climate change pages are "being updated." EPA also removed a link to the press release regarding the initial removal of climate change sites and the link to its January 19, 2017 snapshot of epa.gov/climatechange. In September 2018, EPA had removed a link to the EPA's searchable web archive and a link to the technical support request form. The cumulative effect of removing these links from the splash page is the substantial reduction of access to EPA's historical public information about climate change.

Detailed Description of Changes

1. "This page is being updated"

- URL: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/signpost/cc.html (redirected to from https://www.epa.gov/climatechange and at least 84 other https://www.epa.gov/climatechange/* and https://www.epa.gov/climate-impacts/* URLs
- Screenshot 1.1 Changes occurred between **October 17, 2018 3:04 AM** and **October 18, 2018, 11:37 AM ET**
- The last archived version of the full page:
    - April 27, 2017 - http://web.archive.org/web/20170427015842id_/https://www.epa.gov/climatechange

Screenshot 1.1
This screenshot compares the splash pages to which a user is directed from www.epa.gov/climatechange on October 16, 2018 (left) and October 18, 2018 (right). The following details the content that was modified on the page:

1.1a) Header: "This page is being updated" was changed to "We want to help you find what you are looking for."

1.1b) Text:
 "Thank you for your interest in this topic. We are currently updating our website to reflect EPA's priorities under the leadership of President Trump and Administrator Pruitt. If you're looking for an archived version of this page, you can find it on the January 19 snapshot.

Here's what our Public Affairs Office released about these changes."

was changed to:

"You can view an archived version of this content on the January 19, 2017, snapshot."
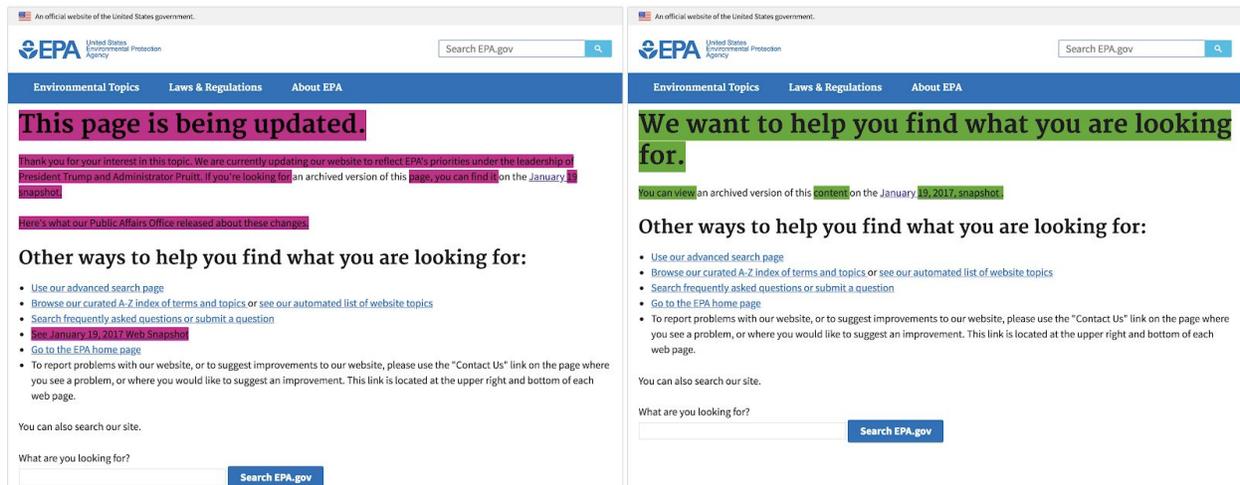
1.1c) Links:
- Replaced a direct link to: https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/climatechange_.html with a link to https://19january2017snapshot.epa.gov/
- Removed a link to a press release explaining the original removal of EPA's climate change sites

The change to https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/signpost/cc.html affects at least 84 URLs in the epa.gov/climatechange subdomain:
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LJpteZpMjFlsopegdAEUep2vo-jWZo8C/view?usp=sharing

Screenshot 1.1

2. "This page is being updated" -- previous modification in September 2018

- URL: https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/signpost/cc.html (redirected to from https://www.epa.gov/climatechange and at least 84 other https://www.epa.gov/climatechange/* URLs
- Screenshot 2.1 Changes occurred between **September 21, 2018 2:57 AM ET** and **September 22, 2018 3:18 AM ET**
- The last archived version of the full page:
  - April 27, 2017 - http://web.archive.org/web/20170427015842id_/https://www.epa.gov/climatechange

Screenshot 2.1
This screenshot compares the splash pages to which a user is directed from www.epa.gov/climatechange on May 1, 2017 (left) and September 23, 2018 (right). The following details the content that was modified on the page:

2.1a) Links:
- Removed text and link for the EPA Web Archive (https://archive.epa.gov).
- Removed link to "Report a website issue" (https://www.epa.gov/home/forms/send-request-technical-support, which now returns an error, "Sorry, but this web page is not available for viewing right now.").

● Added text instructions for reporting an error, "To report problems with our website, or to suggest improvements to our website, please use the "Contact Us" link on the page where you see a problem, or where you would like to suggest an improvement. This link is located at the upper right and bottom of each web page."

Screenshot 2.1