

Democratizing Data Project Brief

Background: On October 20th 2020, EDGI released the *Democratizing Data: Environmental Enforcement Watch's Report Cards for Congressional Oversight of the EPA* project. This project provides, for the first time, an analysis of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) data on compliance with, and enforcement of, environmental laws in congressional districts and states.

Project outcomes include 76 customized report cards for each of the representatives and senators who serve on the key congressional committees that oversee the EPA – The House Energy and Commerce Committee and the Senate Environment and Public Works committee – and a summary report of key findings across all districts and states.

Takeaways: EPA Data Show

- Violations of the Clean Water Act during the Trump administration increased in almost all the states and congressional districts we analyzed.
- Inspection rates during the Trump administration fell in most of the states and congressional districts we analyzed.
- Enforcement actions during the Trump administration declined in most of the states and congressional districts we analyzed, and penalties have fallen almost universally.
- In 2019 violations of the Clean Water Act evidence a crisis in regulatory compliance.
- These patterns occurred consistently in Democratic and Republican congressional districts and states.

The project focuses on three of the most important environmental laws: the Clean Air Act (CAA) stationary sources, the Clean Water Act (CWA) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). All the Report Card data are drawn from publicly available data from the EPA Enforcement and Compliance History Online (ECHO) database. Each report card is freely available online [here](#) and was produced using open source data analysis in Jupyter Notebooks found [here](#).

Our goals with this project are to:

1. Increase public awareness of the large and growing gaps in EPA's enforcement of environmental laws.
2. Provide elected representatives and constituents with data through which to analyze whether the EPA is meeting its mandate to enforce environmental laws in their districts.

Decreases in enforcement actions have occurred across the country. And the decreases have happened in both states with Democratic senators, where 100% of districts saw a decrease, and in Republican districts, where 91% of districts saw a decrease.

Key findings

1. In 46 of 55 congressional districts and 14 of 20 states, **violations of the CWA** have increased since Trump took office compared to the previous 16 years.
2. The median increase in CWA violations during the Trump administration in comparison to the previous 16 years was 98% in congressional districts and 60% in states examined.
3. In 2019, 32 of 55 congressional districts and 13 of 20 states registered more than one violation for each operating facility on average.
4. In 2019, among the House Energy and Commerce Committee's congressional districts, there were 143 Clean Water Act violations per 100 operating facilities.
- 5. Among the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee's States in 2019, there were 154 Clean Water Act violations per 100 operating facilities.**
6. There were 23 districts and 11 states where more than 20% of operating facilities have been in violation of the CWA for at least 9 months of the last 3.25 years or 3 out of the previous 13 quarters (1 quarter is 3 months).
7. In 36 of 55 congressional districts and 13 of 20 states, **inspections** under the CAA, CWA, and RCRA have decreased since Trump took office.
8. The median decline in **inspections** was 17% in congressional districts and 14% in states during the Trump administration compared to the previous 16 years.
9. In 41 of 55 congressional districts and 18 of 20 states analyzed, there was a decline in the number of **enforcement actions** taken under the CAA, CWA, and RCRA since Trump took office.
- 10. The median decline in enforcement actions was 28% in congressional districts and 23% in states during the Trump administration compared to the previous 16 years.**
11. In 44 of 55 congressional districts and 19 of 20 states, there was a decline in penalties levied under the CAA, CWA, and RCRA since Trump took office.
12. The median decline in penalties was 69% in congressional districts and 53% in states during the Trump administration compared to the previous 16 years.
13. Violations increased and enforcement decreased in both Republican and Democratic districts.