

US government disbands climate-science advisory committee

Panel sought to help businesses and state and local governments prepare for the effects of global warming.

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US President Donald Trump's administration has disbanded a government advisory committee that was intended to help the country prepare for a changing climate.

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration established the committee in 2015 to help businesses and state and local governments make use of the next national climate assessment. The legally mandated report, due in 2018, will lay out the latest climate-change science and describe how global warming is likely to affect the United States, now and in coming decades.

The advisory group's charter expired on 20 August, and Trump administration officials informed members late last week that it would not be renewed. “It really makes me worried and deeply sad,” says Richard Moss, a climate scientist at the University of Maryland in College Park and co-chair of the committee. “It’s another thing that is just part of the political football game.”

The decision to wind down the advisory committee came as the Trump administration approached a major deadline related to the forthcoming climate assessment. On 18 August, 13 federal agencies were due to deliver their final comments on a federal report on the state of climate science — a technical prelude to the main climate assessment due out next year.

Scientists in academia and at government agencies have raised concerns that climate sceptics in the Trump administration — particularly at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) — might try to meddle with the document. But Michael Kuperberg, executive director of the US government's multi-agency Global Change Research Program, said in an e-mailed statement that the climate-science report, which is tentatively scheduled for release in November, “is on track to meet this goal”.



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Richard Wright, a retired engineer who is serving on a climate panel organized by the American Society of Civil Engineers, laments the Trump administration's decision to disband the climate advisory committee. He says the panel has already become a valuable mechanism to bring together federal scientists and outside professionals who handle tasks such as managing water resources, setting standards for construction and establishing communications networks.

"We found this committee a very effective way of communicating with the climate and weather community," Wright says. "It would be a pity not to have it."

Moss says that the committee members hope to push forward with their work outside the federal advisory committee process. "We believe in the importance of completing this charge, and we will find a way to do it," he says.

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The decision to let the advisory committee's charter lapse is not the first time that the Trump administration has dismissed scientific advisers. In May and June, the EPA came under fire for dismissing dozens of scientists who were serving on the its Board of Scientific Counselors, which advises the EPA's research arm. And Trump has not chosen a presidential science adviser to lead the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, where a number of positions remain empty.

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