

5 THINGS

North Carolinians Need to Know About Toxic Pollution and EPA Rollbacks



SAFER ✓
NOT SICKER

Federal protections are being rolled back, leaving North Carolina more exposed.

EPA rollbacks are increasing risks for North Carolinians already exposed to toxic pollution in their water, air, food, and communities. The state faces serious threats from PFAS “forever chemicals,” coal ash and power plants, large animal farming operations, and pesticides, with emerging concerns including data centers. Recent EPA decisions to weaken, delay, or eliminate federal safeguards could make those problems harder to address. Read the full *North Carolina Left Exposed* report informed by former EPA experts at [SaferNotSicker.org](https://www.safernotsicker.org).

1 North Carolina is fighting pollution on multiple fronts.

Across North Carolina, people can be exposed to industrial chemicals in the air and drinking water, pollution from power plants, waste from large animal operations, and pesticides used in agriculture.

These risks can overlap. Some communities face several pollution sources at the same time, and the burden is not shared equally. Communities already facing higher levels of pollution can be left even more exposed when multiple federal safeguards are weakened at once.



Why it matters: North Carolina needs the science, monitoring, enforcement, funding, and cleanup support of a fully functioning EPA to address multiple pollution sources and hold companies accountable.

2 PFAS is a statewide problem.

North Carolina is known for PFAS contamination in the Cape Fear River, but the problem extends far beyond one company or one region.

PFAS can enter drinking water from industrial sites, military bases, airports, and other sources — putting people who rely on groundwater or private wells at particular risk.

Some PFAS are linked to increased risks of certain cancers, immune effects, reproductive problems, and developmental harm.



What is changing: EPA is delaying compliance for PFOA and PFOS drinking-water protections, and moving away from limits for several other PFAS, including GenX. North Carolina can take steps to address contamination, but it cannot replace national standards, federal science, or federal responsibility to control pollution at its source.

3 Coal's toxic legacy in North Carolina isn't over.

North Carolina has four active coal-fired power plants, and coal ash sites left from decades of coal generation. Coal ash can contaminate groundwater and waterways, while burning coal releases mercury and other harmful air pollution. People near coal plants and ash sites, workers exposed to coal ash dust, and families relying on nearby private wells can face greater risks.



What is changing: EPA is weakening or delaying safeguards for coal ash, toxic wastewater, and air pollution. That leaves North Carolina with more responsibility for protecting communities.

4 Agricultural pollution puts rural communities at greater risk.

Agriculture is central to North Carolina's economy, but some practices create significant pollution risks.

Large animal operations produce substantial waste that can pollute nearby air and water.

Farmworkers and pesticide applicators can be exposed directly to pesticides, while nearby families can face exposure through spray drift or contaminated water.



Why it matters: These risks are difficult for individuals to control. EPA is delaying some pesticide protections, approving pesticides containing PFAS, and reducing staffing, science and environmental justice capacity that help identify and address community risks.

EMERGING CONCERN: DATA CENTERS

650 Diesel Engines. One North Carolina County.

Amazon and Duke Energy have had permits approved for roughly 650 diesel engines in Richmond County amid growing data-center development.

5 Weaker EPA protections shift more burdens to North Carolina and its families.

State and local governments play an important role in protecting North Carolinians, but they cannot fully replace the federal government.

When EPA protections are weakened, delayed, or eliminated, pollution does not disappear. More responsibility falls on state agencies, local governments, utilities, workers, and families to manage the consequences.

Families cannot filter every contaminant, avoid every polluted area, or identify every invisible chemical they may encounter.



Why it matters: Federal safeguards are designed to reduce pollution before people are exposed. When those protections are weakened, North Carolina communities can face greater exposure while more responsibility falls on state agencies, local governments, utilities, workers, and families.

THE BOTTOM LINE

North Carolina already faces significant risks from toxic pollution. Weakening federal safeguards makes those risks harder to address. EPA's job is to prevent pollution before people are exposed, use credible science to set standards that protect health, and ensure companies follow the law.

North Carolinians should be able to rely on strong EPA protections that make their families safer, not sicker.

Find out what's happening in your community.
Read the full North Carolina Left Exposed report at [SaferNotSicker.org](https://www.safernotsicker.org).

