

# Report: Texas ranks second in budget cuts for environmental protection

An analysis by the Washington, D.C.-based Environmental Integrity Project found that 30 states have cut funding to environmental agencies over the past decade. In Texas, lawmakers slashed spending by more than a third between 2008 and 2018.

BY **KIAH COLLIER** DEC. 5, 2019 12 AM CENTRAL

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In the past decade, a historic industrial buildout has taken hold in Texas — thanks to the [fracking revolution](#) — and has created vast wealth and greatly increased the need for government permitting of new facilities, as well as pollution monitoring.

But during the same time period, Texas lawmakers cut funding to the state agency responsible for doing those things by 35%, according to a new report from the Environmental Integrity Project, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit founded by former U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials. That funding reduction, adjusted for inflation, came even as the state budget grew by 41%.

Among the 30 states that cut spending to environmental agencies between 2008 and 2018, the report found that Texas ranks second in the size of reductions. In fiscal year 2008, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality had \$578 million at its disposal in today's dollars; last year, it had \$374 million.

The state that cut spending on environmental protection the most is Wisconsin, where lawmakers reduced funding by 36%, according to the report. It found that the vast majority of states that cut spending — 25 — did so by at least 10%, with 16 of them cutting funding by more than 20%.

The report also found that 10 additional states cut staffing at environmental agencies over the past decade, even though their budgets did not decrease. All figures in the report were adjusted for inflation.

TCEQ spokesperson Andrew Keese said the agency "does not have a comment on a report it has not seen."

The Environmental Integrity Project emphasized in its report that the cuts have come as the Trump administration has advocated for shifting more responsibility for environmental

protection to state governments and cut funding to the EPA for pollution control and science programs by 16%.

“The Trump Administration has been trying to roll back EPA’s authority and funding by arguing that the states will pick up the slack and keep our air and waters clean,” EIP Executive Director Eric Schaeffer, a former director of civil enforcement at EPA, said in a written statement.

“This is just a shell game, however,” he added, “because state agencies are often badly understaffed and the EPA workforce is already at its lowest level in more than thirty years.”

While Texas ranks second in overall funding cuts, TCEQ staff reductions aren't as dramatic as they are at other state agencies. Between 2008 and 2018, Illinois lost the most staffers — 38% of what used to be 1,028 full-time equivalents. During the same time, TCEQ staff shrank by 9%, to 2,616 positions.

But funding cuts in Texas are particularly acute for some pollution control programs, the report found. From 2008 to 2018, the budget for TCEQ's [Pollution Prevention Planning](#) program shrank by 70%, for example.

Texas environmental groups said the deep budget cuts are startling given the state's prolific industrial activity. It is already the nation's top producer of crude oil and natural gas, and it is seeing a burst of new fossil fuel-related construction aimed at transporting and exporting what's being produced in the Permian Basin of West Texas and New Mexico — the nation's [most active](#) oilfield.

“Despite the huge Permian Basin boom, Texas has a miniscule amount of air monitoring equipment in West Texas to measure ozone, sulfur dioxide, hydrogen sulfide and particulate matter, despite repeated complaints by residents,” said Cyrus Reed of the Texas Chapter of the Sierra Club. “With so much development occurring, and so much reported emissions events in the Permian Basin, TCEQ is unable to respond to concerns of the community about pollution.”

According to the report, the state has approved more than 700 air quality permits for the construction or expansion of industrial facilities since 2012, including 95 major oil and gas facilities, with 14 more facilities seeking approval.

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