

Alert



The **Alert** newsletter provides monthly updates on transportation and air quality planning activities within the Delaware Valley.

April 2025

Environmental Regulation

United States Environmental Protection Agency Announces Plans for Deregulation

On March 12, United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lee Zeldin [announced](#) the agency was reconsidering programs and regulations as part of an EPA agency-wide push for deregulation. Administrator Zeldin described the day of his announcement as “the greatest day of deregulation our nation has seen,” explaining, “We are driving a dagger straight into the heart of the climate change religion to drive down cost of living for American families, unleash American energy, bring auto jobs back to the U.S. and more.”

Many of the regulations being reconsidered cover air and water pollution from power plants and other parts of the energy sector. The reconsiderations will likely affect several rules, like the Clean Power Plan 2.0, that were set to require ambitious reductions in emissions from coal- and natural gas-fueled power plants.

The possible effects of energy sector deregulation extend to several different air pollutants. Rules such as the [New Source Performance Standards](#) (NSPS) for the control of volatile organic compound (VOC) and sulfur dioxide (SO₂) emissions from crude oil and natural gas facilities and the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) for power plants are being reconsidered. Explaining the reconsideration of MATS, the administration released a [fact sheet](#) that stated, “We are concerned that this rule creates undue burden on certain coal-fired power plants,” and the “[i]ndustry believes that EPA underestimated the compliance costs of the rule and that there are no meaningful public health benefits to be gained from the rule’s mandated [Hazardous Air Pollutants] emissions.” According to the [EPA](#), “mercury occurs naturally in coal and other fossil fuels, when people burn these fuels for energy, the mercury becomes airborne and goes into the atmosphere. In the United States, power plants that burn coal to create electricity are the largest source of emissions; they account for about 44 percent of all manmade mercury emissions.” Mercury emissions have declined over time. According to data from the EPA’s [Toxic Release Inventory](#) (TRI) Program, releases of mercury to air decreased by 57% between 2013 and 2022. Explaining the changes EPA stated, “[a]n 85% reduction (-41,000 pounds) in mercury air emissions from electric utilities drove the overall decline from 2013 to 2022. The decrease was driven by a shift from coal to other fuel sources (e.g., natural gas) and by the installation of pollution control technologies at coal-fired power plants”

Other actions mentioned in the March 12 press release as part of the “unleashing American energy” agenda include reconsidering the effluent guidelines that currently regulate wastewater from the oil and gas sector and the “Risk Management Program rule that made America’s oil and natural gas refineries and chemical facilities less safe.”

In addition to “unleashing American energy,” the recent announcement also highlights how the new EPA administration is focusing on “lowering the cost of living for American families” and “advancing cooperative federalism” by reconsidering actions taken by EPA under the previous administration designed to reduce air pollution from transportation and other sectors. A



Save the Date

Wednesday

April 30, 2025

**US DOT Maritime
Administration Port
Infrastructure
Development Program**

[Applications Due](#)

For more information visit:
www.maritime.dot.gov/PIDGrants

Tuesday

May 13, 2025

**New Jersey Trees for
Schools Grant Program**

[Applications Due](#)

For more information visit:
bit.ly/TreesforSchools

separate [press release](#), also from March 12, focused on the auto industry and stated that EPA is reconsidering the multi-pollutant emissions standards for light- and medium-duty vehicles that were finalized in 2024 and several aspects of the Clean Trucks Plan including the emissions standards for heavy-duty vehicles. These automotive standards were finalized between 2022 and 2024 and are set to begin taking effect in model year 2027. Regarding air quality planning, EPA also stated that it is reviewing the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}), which was recently strengthened from 12 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³) to 9 µg/m³, and the [Regional Haze Program](#), which, since 1999, has required states and the federal government to develop plans to prevent visual haze resulting from poor air quality in national parks and wilderness areas.

EPA has yet to release specific guidance superseding most of the regulations under reconsideration, and proposed changes may be challenged in the federal judiciary or subject to approval by Congress.

Funding Opportunity

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Announces \$4.5 Million Funding Opportunity for Tree Plantings at Schools

On March 5, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), in partnership with The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) and the nonprofit organization Sustainable Jersey, [announced](#) \$4.5 million in grants to fund tree planting projects at schools across the state. The grant program, Trees for Schools, will competitively award grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$250,000 to projects at public schools, county colleges, and state colleges and universities in New Jersey. Costs eligible to be covered under the grant program include those associated with “planning, site preparation, tree purchases, planting, watering, monitoring, and maintenance over a three-year period.”

Well-maintained trees in urban areas are an important but often overlooked aspect of livable communities. They help reduce the impacts of extreme heat by counteracting what is known as the heat island effect in which concentrations of built structures absorb and re-emit the sun’s heat more than the surrounding natural landscape, causing more densely developed areas to become hotter than their surroundings. Trees can also benefit their environs by improving neighborhood appeal, mitigating stormwater runoff, and filtering particulate matter and other air pollutants. However, despite trees being broadly beneficial to built-up areas, human development can have negative impacts on the health and longevity of trees. This means that, especially in more urbanized areas, regular monitoring and maintenance is required for the trees planted by urban forestry initiatives to reach their full potential.

The \$4.5 million Trees for Schools program is one of several environmental initiatives in New Jersey funded by the State’s proceeds from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a regional cap-and-trade program intended to reduce emissions from electricity generation while raising revenue to fund investments in communities. According to the [organization](#), since 2005, the ten states currently participating in the initiative—Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont—have reduced power sector emissions by 50 percent while raising \$8.6 billion for projects in their respective states.

The program is also supported by Sustainable Jersey, a nonprofit organization that maintains a certification program for municipalities in New Jersey that are committed to advancing sustainability by addressing environmental and socioeconomic challenges. According to its [website](#), Sustainable Jersey, which is currently organized as 501(c)(3) and administered by the Sustainability Institute at TCNJ, grew out of an informal partnership between TCNJ, a group of “green mayors” at the New Jersey League of Municipalities, NJDEP, and the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. In addition to its certification program, the organization also provides training and technical assistance to municipalities and school districts.

Applications for spring 2026 plantings are due May 13, 2025.



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