

Advertisement

**LETTERS**

Joint statement on EPA proposed rule and public availability of data (2019)

H. Holden Thorp^{1,*}, Magdalena Skipper², Veronique Kiermer³, May Berenbaum⁴, Deborah Sweet⁵, Richard Horton⁶

[+ See all authors and affiliations](#)

Science 26 Nov 2019:
eaba3197
DOI: 10.1126/science.aba3197

[Article](#)[Info & Metrics](#)[eLetters](#)[PDF](#)

Eighteen months after articulating our concerns (1) regarding the 2018 “Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science” rule proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (2), we have become more concerned in response to recent media coverage and a 13 November hearing on the role of science in decision-making at the EPA. These events suggest that the proposed rule is now moving toward implementation; whether it includes amendments sufficient to address the concerns raised by us and many others remains a question.

Our previous statement on the proposed rule, authored and published by the editors-in-chief of five major scientific journals in May 2018, reflected alarm that the proposal’s push for “transparency”

As leaders of peer-reviewed journals, we support open sharing of research data, but we also recognize the validity of scientific studies that, for confidentiality reasons, cannot indiscriminately share absolutely all data. Datasets featuring personal identifiers—including studies evaluating genomes of thousands of people to characterize medically relevant genetic variants—are but one example. Such data may be critical to developing new drugs or diagnostic tools but cannot be shared openly; even anonymized personal data can be subject to re-identification, and it has been a longstanding practice for agencies and journals to acknowledge the value of data privacy adjustments. The principles of careful data management, as they inform medicine, are just as applicable to data regarding environmental influences on public health. Discounting evidence from the decision-making process on the basis that some data are confidential runs counter to the EPA stated mission “to reduce environmental risks...based on the best available scientific information” (4).

We are also concerned about how the agency plans to consider options related to existing regulations. Even if a new standard is not applied retroactively, the standard could apply when a regulation is updated; thus, foundational science from years past—research on air quality and asthma, for example, or water quality and human health—could be deemed by the EPA to be insufficient for informing our most significant public health issues. That would be a catastrophe.

We urge the EPA to continue to adopt an approach that ensures the data used in decision-making are the best available, which will at times require consideration of peer-reviewed scientific data, not all of which may be open to all members of the public. The most relevant science, vetted through peer review, should inform public policy. Anything less will harm decision-making that claims to protect our health.

We hope that in the end, decisions that are made to inform the proposed EPA rule will rise above any form of politics, focusing on what’s best for our communities. We encourage anyone with concerns or opinions about this issue to express their views through relevant legislative channels. Whether submitting public comments to the EPA or communicating with lawmakers in Congress, it is important to emphasize that decision-making that affects us all should be informed by nothing less than the full suite of relevant science vetted through peer review.

References and Notes

1. [↩](#) J. Berg, P. Campbell, V. Kiermer, N. Raikhel, D. Sweet, *Science* **360**, eaau0116 (2018).
doi:10.1126/science.aau0116pmid:29712878 [FREE Full Text](#) [Google Scholar](#)

[Google Scholar](#)

4. [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Our mission and what we do" \(2018\); \[www.epa.gov/aboutepa/our-mission-and-what-we-do\]\(http://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/our-mission-and-what-we-do\). \[Google Scholar\]\(#\)](#)

Recommended articles from TrendMD

Whose science? A new era in regulatory "science wars"

Wendy Wagner et al., Science, 2018

Critics see hidden goal in EPA data access rule

Warren Cornwall, Science, 2018

Obfuscating with transparency

Jeremy Berg, Science, 2018

White House Softens Disputed Peer-Review Plan

Jocelyn Kaiser, Science, 2004

Praise, for a Change

Donald Kennedy, Science, 2004

EPA chief signs proposal limiting science used in decisions

Phys.org, 2018

EPA puts off final decision on science transparency rule

Phys.org, 2018

The push for more clinical research data sharing is paying off

MedicalXpress

Will research preprints improve healthcare for patients?

Harlan M Krumholz et al., The BMJ, 2018

EPA releases report on climate change and health

MedicalXpress, 2008

Powered by **TREND MD**

ARTICLE TOOLS

 [Email](#)

 [Save to my folders](#)

 [Alerts](#)

 [Share](#)

 [Print](#)

 [Request Permissions](#)

 [Citation tools](#)

Advertisement

[Become a Member](#)

[Log In](#) [ScienceMag.org](#) 

SIMILAR ARTICLES IN:

- [Google Scholar](#)
-

Advertisement



NAVIGATE THIS ARTICLE

- [Article](#)
 - [References and Notes](#)
- [Info & Metrics](#)
- [eLetters](#)
- [PDF](#)

Read the Latest Issue of *Science*

22 November 2019

Vol 366, Issue 6468



[Table of Contents](#)

FEATURE

The landslide laboratory

NATURAL HAZARDS

How low should we go when warning for earthquakes?

ARCHAEOLOGY

Excavating Uruk

SCI COMMUN

News at a glance

ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

The world in a song

WORKING LIFE

Sidestepping politics to teach climate

Get Our E-Alerts

Receive emails from *Science*. [See full list](#)

[Become a Member](#)[Log In](#) [ScienceMag.org](#)  [Science Careers Job Seeker](#)

I agree to receive emails from AAAS/*Science* and *Science* advertisers, including information on products, services, and special offers which may include but are not limited to news, career information, & upcoming events.

[Sign up today](#)

Required fields are indicated by an asterisk (*)

About Us

[Journals](#)[News from Science](#)[Leadership](#)[Team Members](#)[Work at AAAS](#)

For Advertisers

[Advertising Kits](#)[Awards and Prizes](#)[Custom Publishing](#)[Webinars](#)

For Authors

[Submit](#)[Information for Authors](#)[Editorial Policies](#)

For Librarians

[Manage Your Institutional Subscription](#)[Information for Librarians](#)[Request a Quote](#)[FAQs](#)

Related Sites

[AAAS.org](#)[EurekAlert!](#)[Science in the Classroom](#)[Science Magazine Japanese](#)

[Become a Member](#)[Log In](#) [ScienceMag.org](#) 

Stay Connected



© 2019 American Association for the Advancement of Science. All rights reserved. AAAS is a partner of HINARI, AGORA, OARE, CHORUS, CLOCKSS, CrossRef and COUNTER.
Science ISSN 1095-9203.

[Terms of Service](#)[Privacy Policy](#)[Contact AAASs](#)