

White House Aides Evacuate Over Asbestos Risks as Administration Moves to Keep Deadly Carcinogen Legal

By [EWG](#)

Global Research, August 26, 2019
[EWG](#) 22 August 2019

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Law and Justice](#)

Ivanka Trump, Kellyanne Conway and other senior White House aides have vacated their West Wing offices while asbestos is removed – even as the Trump administration is manipulating a federal chemical safety law to keep asbestos legal.

[Bloomberg](#) reported that a number of staffers, also including policy aide Stephen Miller and economic aide Larry Kudlow, have temporarily relocated while new fire safety equipment and other updates are being installed. The asbestos removal comes despite the fact that President Trump is a longstanding fan of the deadly fireproof material, a notorious carcinogen that kills tens of thousands of Americans each year.

In his 1997 book, “The Art of the Comeback,” Trump argued that asbestos is “100 percent safe, once applied.” In 2005, [Trump testified before Congress](#), claiming asbestos would have kept the World Trade Center from collapsing following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

And last year, one of the world’s biggest producers of asbestos, a Russian company with ties to [Vladimir Putin](#), used an image of the president to label pallets of asbestos “APPROVED BY DONALD TRUMP.” The company said it was praising Trump for the administration’s efforts to keep asbestos legal for use in the U.S.

“While these measures are being taken to protect White House employees, the president and his EPA chief Andrew Wheeler are actively working to ensure this deadly carcinogen remains legal,” said Linda Reinstein, president and founder of the [Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization](#), or ADAO. “Every American should be protected from exposure to asbestos, and the only way to ensure that is to ban it once and for all from being imported and used in the U.S.”

“When it comes to his own family and closest aides, President Trump takes steps to protect them from asbestos,” said EWG President Ken Cook. “But for the 327 million Americans who don’t work in the White House, the president and Wheeler don’t show as much concern. Protecting public health was once a top priority for presidents, but not now, and there is no better example than the Trump administration’s outrageous push to keep asbestos legal.”

In 2016, Congress passed legislation revamping the woefully weak federal Toxic Substances Control Act finally giving the Environmental Protection Agency the authority to ban asbestos and other dangerous substances. But under Wheeler’s direction, the agency is laying the groundwork to allow asbestos [to remain legal](#).

In April, Wheeler issued a new rule that would allow manufacturers to resume abandoned uses of asbestos if approved by the EPA. Internal agency memos, obtained by ADAO and reported [by The New York Times](#), show that top political appointees at EPA ignored calls by agency scientists and lawyers to implement an outright ban.

The EPA banned asbestos, in 1989, only to see the ban overturned two years later after a court challenge by the chemical industry. Since 1989:

- More than 1 million Americans have died from preventable asbestos-caused diseases, according to ADAO's analysis of data from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, at the University of Washington.
- Although domestic production of asbestos has ended, ADAO's analysis of U.S. Geological Survey data shows that an estimated 375,000 metric tons of asbestos have been imported to the U.S. The chlor-alkali industry is the main importer of raw asbestos, which relies on it to produce chlorine and other chemicals.
- Nearly 70 other countries have banned asbestos.

The Environmental Working Group Action Fund's analysis of federal mortality data estimates that asbestos-triggered diseases kill [an estimated 15,000 Americans a year](#). Last year, an international peer-reviewed study found the annual death toll from asbestos exposure may be [much higher](#) - nearly 40,000 Americans a year, and more than 255,000 a year worldwide.

Members of Congress are making efforts to block the Trump administration's move to allow asbestos to remain legal for use. Legislation sponsored by Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) and Reps. Suzanne Bonamici (D-Ore.), Frank Pallone (D-N.J.) and Elissa Slotkin (D-Mich.) would ban the import, manufacture and distribution of all forms of asbestos.

The [Alan Reinstein Ban Asbestos Now Act](#) would also require the EPA, Labor Department and Department of Health and Human Services to conduct a comprehensive review to assess the "presence of asbestos in residential, commercial, industrial, public, and school buildings" and "the extent of exposure and risk to human health associated with the asbestos present in such buildings."

The legislation is named after Linda Reinstein's husband, Alan Reinstein, who died in May 2006 of mesothelioma, an incurable cancer caused only by asbestos.

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