

EPA panel's recommendations are ignored

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is, for the first time, ignoring recommendations from its Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee.

Instead, the EPA is implementing relaxed rules governing how much soot and dust can be permitted in the air from agriculture and mining, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported Monday.

The air pollution dispute and other recent clashes highlight what scientists contend is their increasingly diminished role in policy to protect public health and the environment under the Bush administration.

"The purpose of this committee is to provide the best scientific advice available, and he didn't take it," said Committee Chairwoman Rogene Henderson, referring to EPA Administrator Stephen Johnson.

The committee is comprised of 22 members, including physicians, toxicologists, chemists and prominent researchers. The rejection of some of their conclusions troubles Henderson -- a Republican-appointed toxicologist from New Mexico who is in charge of assembling other scientific panels to help tailor air pollution rules.

"I have a concern about this demoralizing people," she told the Post-Dispatch. "These are very high-powered scientists, and they don't have a lot of time. But they make the time, because they believe that their work can make a difference."

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