

EPA grants pollution waiver to Florida utilities after Irma

September 11 2017, by Michael Biesecker

State and federal environmental regulators issued a blanket waiver on Monday for Florida electricity companies to violate clean air and water standards without penalty for the next two weeks.

The Environmental Protection Agency said the so-called No Action Assurance granted through Sept. 26 came at the request of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. The [letter](#) said the move will provide Florida utility generators needed flexibility to maintain and restore electricity supplies in the wake of Hurricane Irma. The EPA said the move was in the public's interest.

Florida's Division of Emergency Management said about noon on Monday that 6.52 million utility customers in the state were without power. That's more than 65 percent of all electricity customers.

The EPA's assurance letter will allow utilities to operate outside restrictions mandated by their permits, including potentially using dirtier fuels, running for longer hours or electively bypassing pollution control equipment. Coal-fired plants can also discharge wastewater laced with levels of toxic-heavy metals at higher concentrations than what would normally be permitted.

The utilities are still required to monitor and report the levels of regulated contaminants in their air emissions and water discharges, according to the letter.

The Associated Press reported last week that [air pollution levels](#) spiked in the Houston area after a similar enforcement waiver was granted to Texas petrochemical facilities ahead of Hurricane Harvey's arrival.

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