

BUSINESS

EPA warns more than 100 workers at RTP campus they could be fired at any time

By **Brian Gordon**

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The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency campus in North Carolina's Research Triangle Park is the agency's largest physical site.
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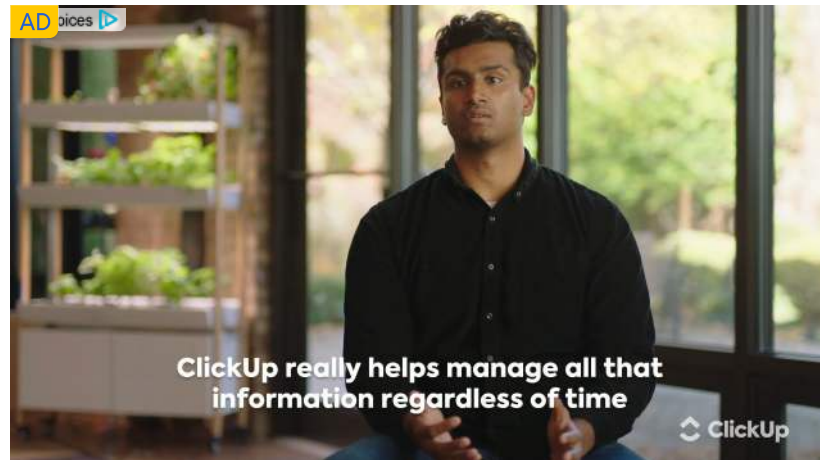
The start of the Trump administration has brought changes and uncertainties to the Environmental Protection Agency and its large Research Triangle Park campus.

In an email last week, the agency cautioned more than 130 local employees they could be fired without notice due to their probationary status, which is not based on

performance but on time worked at the EPA, lasting between one and two years.

“As a probationary/trial period employee, the agency has the right to immediately terminate you,” the EPA told staff in a Jan. 29 message reviewed by The News & Observer.

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Around 1,100 EPA employees overall received this communication, the American Federation of Government Employees confirmed, including approximately 1 in 10 workers who report to the 509-acre North Carolina site. The campus is the [agency's biggest](#) and focuses on air-quality regulations.

“People were very nervous about receiving that,” said Holly Wilson, president of AFGE Local 3347, which represents about 1,000 EPA employees in the Triangle. “We have a lot of folks who came to the agency and RTP with the intention of having a long federal career, and that just kind of threw them for a loop,” she said.

EPA officials asked employees to respond if they had previous federal work service, including in the military, which could impact their probationary status. Staff have more job protections once they move out of the trial period.

The email arrived as the Trump Administration is offering deferred resignations to federal employees, including at the EPA. Workers have been notified of this buyout option, titled “Fork in the Road,” through multiple emails in the past week.

Eligible employees have until Feb. 6 to indicate their interest in resigning. “There will NOT be an extension of this program,” the U.S. Office of Personnel Management informed workers in an email Tuesday, with the word “not” appearing in bold.

As of Feb. 4, the White House said more than 20,000 federal workers had accepted the buyout offer, [multiple new outlets reported](#).

The program is part of billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk's effort to shrink the federal workforce through the newly created Department of Government Efficiency, which he leads. In 2022, Musk [messed Twitter employees](#) with a similar subject line, "A Fork in the Road," shortly after he bought the platform (now called X) and before he cut thousands of jobs.

EPA's return to office and senior leadership demotions

In June, then-EPA Administrator Michael Regan said his agency [had hired 5,200 workers](#) during the Biden Administration. Yet an expected reduction in headcount over the next four years wouldn't be the only change coming to the EPA.

On Jan. 24, the agency informed employees that staff on telework and remote work agreements [must report to their worksites full-time](#) by Feb. 24. This rule was issued to comply with President Donald Trump's "Return to In-Person Work" executive action.

"We're still waiting for additional guidance on how the agency intends to implement that executive order," Wilson said. She highlighted the need to set up offices and computers, as well as where staff who live over an hour away from an agency site will report.

The Trump Administration also plans to demote certain senior career EPA employees and replace them with political appointees, [The New York Times reported](#) Tuesday. Among the four EPA divisions that would be impacted by this shift include the Office of Research and Development and the Office of Mission Support, which both have offices at the RTP campus.

In a statement Tuesday to The N&O, agency spokesperson Shayla Powell said "as is common practice and has become more prevalent across administrations, EPA updated its organizational structure to match other federal agencies."

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