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EPA Leaders of transportation, atmospheric offices change places

Maxine Joselow, E&E News reporter *Published: Friday, June 7, 2019*

EPA has reassigned the head of its transportation office.

Chris Grundler, who's led the Office of Transportation and Air Quality since 2012, will swap places with Office of Atmospheric Programs chief Sarah Dunham on Aug. 4. Both are career staffers.

Bill Wehrum, who leads the Office of Air and Radiation, which includes both the transportation and atmospheric offices, issued a statement saying his office "is very fortunate to have leaders with the level of experience, expertise, executive skill, and commitment to EPA's mission that Chris and Sarah bring to their work."

"This brings fresh and different perspectives to these critical EPA offices, while providing new leadership opportunities for two outstanding senior executives," Wehrum said. "I look forward to working with Chris and Sarah in their new roles."

In the Obama administration EPA, Grundler oversaw the development of greenhouse gas emission standards for cars. The Trump administration is now proposing to roll back those

standards. Career staffers in Grundler's shop expressed opposition to the rollback in comments to the White House Office of Management and Budget.

Staffer Bill Charmley, for one, wrote the proposed rollback would be "detrimental to safety, rather than beneficial as suggested" (*Climatewire*, Aug. 15, 2018).

Christopher Grundler. U.S. EPA

Margo Oge, who led EPA's transportation office under President Obama, said she initially viewed the move as retaliation against Grundler for his staff's comments on the proposed car rule changes but then changed her mind. Moving Grundler out of the transportation office, she said, would have little to no effect on the rollback, which the agency is seeking to finalize this month.

"It's a done deal. We know that the final rule is going to roll back the standards," Oge said. "So by moving Chris Grundler, I don't see how that's going to change anything."

As for Dunham, Oge had only praise: "I think she's absolutely fantastic. She's brilliant. She's a good manager."

Oge added, "I think it will be good for both of them."

Trish Koman, who worked as an EPA scientist for 22 years before retiring in 2012, said the timing of the move is suspect. It comes as automakers are pressing the Trump administration to reopen negotiations with California about the car rules rollback (*Climatewire*, June 7).

"At a time when automakers are asking for additional discussion with California, I'm not sure of the rationale for bringing in a new person. [Grundler] has worked with California over the years and has established relationships," said Koman, who's now a research scientist at the University of Michigan School of Public Health.

In addition to the greenhouse gas standards for cars, Grundler oversaw a number of other high-profile initiatives, including investigations into potential cheating on auto emissions tests.

Under Grundler, EPA's National Vehicle and Fuel Emissions Laboratory in Ann Arbor, Mich., helped expose Volkswagen AG's emissions cheating scandal in 2015.

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Speculation

The Office of Atmospheric Programs works on protecting the ozone layer, improving regional air quality and tracking climate change metrics.

During the Obama administration, the office regularly released a climate change indicators report. But the report has languished under President Trump and hasn't been updated since 2016.

Also during the Obama administration, the office worked with the State Department on international climate efforts leading up to the Paris climate accord. But Trump has vowed to

withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement; he has also refused to send the Kigali Amendment to the Senate for ratification.

Morale in the office has consequently dipped under Trump. One staffer told E&E News last year: "It's not a happy place" (*Climatewire*, Nov. 21, 2018).

To that end, some observers interpreted Grundler's reassignment as a demotion.

John Walke of the Natural Resources Defense Council **wrote** on Twitter: "The political head of the Trump @EPA air office, Bill Wehrum, today abruptly deposed the career director of the Office of Transportation & Air Quality, Chris Grundler, exiling him to the office responsible for climate change — the Trump EPA equivalent of Soviet Siberia."

Steve Milloy, the editor of JunkScience.com, a website that seeks to debunk mainstream climate science, said he was pleased to learn of what he viewed as a demotion.

Milloy has promoted the theory that EPA's lab in Ann Arbor colluded with Volvo to skew the test results for high-emission trucks known as glider kits (*Greenwire*, Aug. 24, 2018).

"I think the guy deserves worse," Milloy said. "But I understand you can't really fire people. All you can do is reassign them."

He added, "I think he's just generally part of the resistance and part of the problem for the Trump administration agenda. So he's been assigned to EPA's Siberia."

Grundler didn't respond to an emailed request for comment.

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