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EPA Chief Pledges to Secure Toxic Sites in Irma's Storm Path

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<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-09-07/epa-chief-pledges-to-secure-toxic-sites-in-irma-s-storm-path>

The Trump administration is applying lessons from Hurricane Harvey's drenching of southeast Texas as it secures toxic waste sites in the path of Hurricane Irma, U.S. environmental chief Scott Pruitt said.

The Environmental Protection Agency's main goal is to make sure there are "enough people on the ground" to quickly assess the integrity of at-risk chemical sites and respond to needs as the monster storm moves through, Pruitt said. Technical staff are already working to secure about 80 Superfund sites in Irma's path from Miami to North Carolina, including a former pesticide plant, military base and machine shop.

"Operationally, we've tried to make sure we apply the same type of approach we used in Texas," Pruitt, EPA's administrator, said in an interview Thursday. "Because of the area and the amount of population that's affected in Florida, we're trying to be even more aggressive." ...

Nearly 200 EPA personnel were deployed in Texas. The agency already has about 77 people working on Irma related efforts and another seven are on the way.

Back-to-back hurricanes hitting the U.S. threaten to strain the federal government's resources, prompting the Senate to pass a \$15.25 billion relief bill Thursday, and renewing a debate about the size and scope of federal agencies. The Trump administration has proposed cutting nearly a third of the EPA's budget for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1 and culling roughly 3,200 employees from the agency's 15,000-member workforce, a process that has already begun as hundreds of workers accept buyouts.

Pruitt stressed the EPA has not been hit by budget reductions yet, as Congress weighs how much to spend on the agency.

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