

March 22, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

The White House

1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Michael S. Regan

Administrator

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear President Biden and Administrator Regan:

To protect our health and our communities – especially those that have been traditionally overburdened by pollution – we need action now. According to the American Lung Association, more than 40% of Americans—over 137 million people—are living in places with unhealthy levels of air pollution. That is why, together, the undersigned health experts are calling on you to use your existing authority under our nation's bedrock environmental laws, such as the Clean Air Act, to promulgate the strongest possible standards to protect public health and our environment. We have been encouraged to see forward movement on several critical standards like cross-state air pollution, methane pollution, and heavy duty vehicles. We write to encourage your administration to take the following actions that would have a critical impact on the health and well-being of all Americans:

Particulate Matter (PM)

Setting tighter limits on harmful PM 2.5 pollution also known as soot—in line with the most protective levels recommended by the majority of the Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC) last year—will protect millions of Americans, including vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant individuals, the elderly, and people with asthma and other respiratory and heart conditions. Exposure to fine particle pollution causes a range of health harms, such as increased infant mortality, cardiovascular and respiratory harm, asthma attacks, diabetes, dementia, and premature death.

EPA must:

- Strengthen the annual PM2.5 standard to no higher than 8 µg/m³ and the 24-hour PM2.5 standard to no higher than 25 µg/m³, in line with the most protective level the majority of CASAC recommended.
- Finalize the rule no later than August 2023.

Carbon Pollution

Setting strong rules on existing coal and new and existing gas that put the US on track to a clean electricity sector by 2035 is critical for protecting public health. The power sector accounts for a quarter of climate pollution in the U.S. Dirty power plants harm public health and well-being in a variety of ways, including increased respiratory and cardiovascular disease, injuries and premature deaths from extreme weather events, food scarcity and geographical food distribution, waterborne illnesses and other infectious diseases, and threats to mental health.

EPA must:

- Use its Clean Air Act authority to set the strongest possible carbon pollution limits for new gas-fired power plants under Section 111(b) and existing coal- and gas-fired power plants under Section 111(d).
- To the extent CCS is available as an option for compliance with these rules, EPA must ensure rigorous monitoring and enforcement of any emissions or leaks from capture to sequestration.
- Finalize the standards no later than April 2024.

Mercury and Air Toxic Standards (MATS)

As asserted by national health and medical organizations, the Mercury and Air Toxics Standards (MATS) are, “one of the most important public health protections put in place by EPA to reduce emissions of hazardous air pollutants (HAPs).”¹ Strengthening the standards would reduce emissions from power plants that threaten our health through our air, water and food. Examples of coal- and oil-fired power plant emissions include corrosive substances, carcinogens like formaldehyde and benzene, organic carbon-based toxics, metals, and neurotoxins.

EPA must:

- Strengthen the standards to reflect developments in pollution controls and avoid residual risks to public health.
- Finalize the rule no later than April 2024.

Power Plant Wastewater (Effluent Limitation Guidelines (ELGs)) and Coal Ash

ELGs limit pollutants in wastewater discharge from coal fired power plants, which can include mercury, toxic metals, and other dangerous chemicals. Coal Ash standards would require the safe disposal of coal ash from coal-fired power plants. Unsafe coal ash disposal in landfills or ponds can contaminate groundwater and surface water with toxic chemicals, pollute air with fugitive dust, and cause catastrophic spills.

EPA must:

- Finalize strong standards to protect public health from power plant wastewater and coal ash by April 2024 at the latest.

Ozone

National health and medical organizations have called for a standard no higher than 60 ppb throughout EPA’s past three reviews in 2015, 2020, and 2022. Breathing ozone can cause health problems including premature death, asthma attacks, respiratory infections, increased susceptibility to pulmonary inflammation, cardiovascular harm, and reproductive and developmental harm. Setting tighter limits would better protect public health from the impacts of ozone pollution, especially for people with lung disease and other at-risk populations.

EPA must:

- Strengthen the primary standard to no higher than 60 ppb (the more protective end of the 2015 CASAC recommended range)
- Complete its reconsideration and issue a final rule by April 2024.

We have been dismayed by recent reports that the NAAQS ozone standard proposal may remain un-strengthened and delayed until 2024. We encourage CASAC to follow the science and the law and conclude in the final Policy Assessment that the standard must be strengthened no higher than 60 ppb.

Our communities desperately need clean air, clean water, and a healthy climate. By finalizing the strongest possible standards above, your administration will slash the pollution driving climate change and aggravating

chronic diseases like heart disease, asthma attacks, and other respiratory issues that disproportionately harm vulnerable populations, including traditionally overburdened communities, children, outdoor workers, and the elderly.

Time is running out. The longer we delay, the higher the cost of inaction is to our community in terms of lives, dollars, environmental harm, and other devastating consequences.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Holland		Physicians for Social Responsibility
Abby Novinska-Lois	Executive Director	Wisconsin Health Professionals for Climate Action
Adelaide Mei	Student	Evangelical Environmental Network
Alan McGillivray	Artist	
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Annelle Kaspor	Nurse practitioner	
Asada Rashidi	Environmental Justice Organizer	
Barbara Erny	Physician	Ascrs
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Brehal West		
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Bruce Carroll	Pastor	
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Charon McNabb	President	
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Dalia Larios	Physician	Harvard Radiation Oncology Program
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Dionna Brown		
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Doug Farquhar	Director of Government Affairs	Trustee, California Medical Association
Dr.Jerry Abraham	Physician	CMA
Dr. Kathleen J. Welch	Epidemiologist	

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Megan Williams	Families Pastor	Grace Midtown Church
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