An Open Letter from Health Professionals in support of THE CLEAN AIR ACT AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

MAY 2012
As physicians, nurses, and public health experts, we urge our policy makers to support the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA’s) ability under the Clean Air Act to take action that will protect public health and address climate change.

Climate change poses significant threats to the health and well-being of all Americans, with disproportionate impacts on children, the elderly, and the poor. Our own medical journals and professional organizations (such as the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, and American Nursing Association) have sounded the alarm. Health effects will include heat-related illnesses, exacerbated cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, more frequent outbreaks of water-borne diseases (such as Cryptosporidium) and vector-borne diseases (such as West Nile virus), and mental health impacts resulting from the stress of coping with extreme weather including flooding and hurricanes.

The human and economic costs of these impacts are grave. For instance, a recent report from the Union of Concerned Scientists estimates that in 2020, the continental United States could pay an average of $5.4 billion (in 2008 dollars) in health-related costs due to the increase in surface-level ozone associated with rising temperatures.

On April 2, 2007, the Supreme Court ruled that global warming emissions are air pollutants covered by the Clean Air Act (CAA). Subsequently, the EPA performed an exhaustive review of the relevant scientific research and determined that global warming emissions endanger public health and welfare and therefore must be regulated under the CAA. Because the EPA’s finding is based on well-established science, any effort to prevent or delay the agency from taking action to reduce global warming emissions is a rejection of that science.

The EPA is charged with protecting our public health and our environment, and the Clean Air Act is an extraordinarily successful and cost-effective way of doing so. In 2010 alone, this science-based law prevented an estimated 160,000 premature deaths and millions of cases of respiratory and cardiovascular disease—annual benefits that are projected to grow during the next decade. The Clean Air Act is also good for the economy, with its benefits exceeding its costs by 26 to 1. Now the EPA must be allowed to act on its authority under the law and begin regulating global warming emissions.

Keeping in mind the urgency of America’s climate and energy challenges, the prohibitive cost of inaction, and the many benefits of acting today, we urge you to oppose all attacks on the Clean Air Act. Please respect the scientific integrity of the EPA’s endangerment finding and the agency’s ability to act based on this finding, and stand up for the public health and economic good of our nation.
ENDNOTES

# Health Professionals’ Open Letter to Policy Makers in Support of the Clean Air Act and the Environmental Protection Agency

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