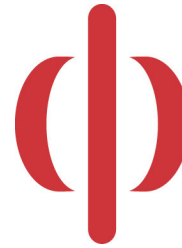


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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
Brian Urbaszewski
312-405-1175 cell



**RESPIRATORY
HEALTH
ASSOCIATIONSM**
of Metropolitan Chicago

EPA UPDATES AIR STANDARDS SET OVER 35 YEARS AGO

1971 was the year cigarette ads were banned on television, Watergate started and Walt Disney World opened. It was also when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) set the allowable health standard for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂). It hasn't updated or changed the standard since.

"It is surprising that it took over 35 years for EPA to tighten the health standard for this dangerous air pollutant. It is gratifying that the government is now taking air pollution seriously and moving to protect people's lungs using sound science," stated Brian Urbaszewski, Director of Environmental Health Programs from the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago.

Under a court ordered deadline, on June 29th EPA proposed updating and strengthening the health standard for NO₂, one of the six main pollutants regulated under the Clean Air Act. Nitrogen dioxide levels are strongly connected to breathing problems. According to EPA, "Current scientific evidence links short-term NO₂ exposures, ranging from 30 minutes to 24 hours, with increased respiratory effects, especially in people with asthma. These effects can lead to increased visits to emergency departments and hospital admissions for respiratory illnesses, particularly in at-risk populations such as children, the elderly, and asthmatics."

Currently EPA only measures the average nitrogen dioxide level over an entire year. Because of the health threats from short term exposure, they are proposing a new hourly health standard. EPA is also proposing to begin monitoring pollution near roadways in major urban areas. Roadway traffic contributes to nitrogen dioxide emissions, putting both motorists and nearby residents at risk for respiratory disease.

Commuters are exposed to a large amount of pollution on their daily travels. Although only about five percent of the average day is spent commuting, drivers are breathing in about half their daily dose of fine particulate soot in that short time period. The use of newer diesel and gasoline engines that meet tighter emissions limits will reduce the amount of nitrogen dioxide and fine particle pollution people breathe. Strategies for reducing unnecessary engine idling, particularly for large diesel vehicles, will also reduce the public's exposure to both pollutants.

"Illinois state law already sets a 10 minute idling limit for large diesel vehicles and local communities may have even stronger restrictions," noted Urbaszewski. "Idling large diesel truck and bus engines simply cause health problems and waste fuel." Industrial facilities and coal-fired power plants that date to the 1950's are also large sources of nitrogen dioxide and fine particulate matter within the Chicago region.

Nitrogen dioxide levels in the Chicago area have recently reached levels that are nearly two-thirds of the way towards violating of the old annual health standard originally set back in 1971. Until new air pollution monitors are set up along area highways to measure hourly pollutant levels, its unknown how much air pollution residents and commuters are actually breathing.

Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago (RHAMC) has been a local public health leader since 1906. Today the Association fights lung disease and promotes healthy lungs by supporting research, advocacy, and educational efforts on behalf of individuals and families affected by lung cancer, asthma, COPD (chronic bronchitis and emphysema), and other lung diseases. For more information, visit www.lungchicago.org.

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Chicago's Lung Health
Leader Since 1906

1440 W. Washington
Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60607-1878
Phone: (312) 243-2000
Fax: (312) 243-3954
www.lungchicago.org