



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 17, 2011

Contact: Julie O'Brien
(312) 628-0251

Experts dispute Metra's characterization that air quality is safe on and around trains

Metra released preliminary findings this weekend that indicate the "average pollution levels" inside their trains meet federal standards for "safe" air pollution. Saying the diesel exhaust in and around Metra trains is not dangerous is akin to saying someone who smokes only a few cigarettes each day shouldn't worry about what they are breathing.

"Exposure to any amount of diesel exhaust is unsafe," said Brian Urbaszewski, director of environmental health programs for Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago.

Diesel exhaust contains a number of deadly air pollutants, including fine particulate matter and 40 chemicals deemed toxic by U.S. EPA.

By relying on average levels and not disputing the factual findings of the *Chicago Tribune* investigation, Metra disregards the health risk to people riding the train at rush hour, a peak time for pollution levels.

"Breathing in any level of diesel pollution is harmful for children, the elderly and people living with lung disease," said Ravi Kalhan, MD, MS, director of Northwestern University's Asthma-COPD Program. "At any level of exposure, the dirty air from Metra's trains can exacerbate symptoms of asthma, COPD and lung cancer."

"Every day that goes by without pollution-cleaning technologies, Metra is putting their customers at risk," said Urbaszewski. "References to OSHA standards, which apply only to workers, confuse the issue. Diesel exhaust is harming people's health. Metra is taking some actions to clean up now by promising to switch to cleaner-burning diesel fuel and reduce idling. But more needs to be done."

Respiratory Health Association and other health advocates continue to call for Metra to use pollution controls to limit idling and reduce emissions from their current fleet while phasing in new locomotives that meet the highest EPA emissions standards beginning in 2015.

###

Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago (RHAMC) has been a local public health leader since 1906. Today, the association addresses asthma, COPD, lung cancer, tobacco control and air quality with a comprehensive approach involving research, education and advocacy activities. To learn more, visit www.lungchicago.org.