



**RESPIRATORY
HEALTH
ASSOCIATIONSM**
of Metropolitan Chicago

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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EPA to release new standards for NO2 emissions, Chicago expected to fail

Cook County has the highest average hourly nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) concentrations measured in the United States. NO₂ poses a health threat to everyone, especially people living with lung disease.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will finalize tighter air quality standards for NO₂ by the end of this week. There is little doubt that the Chicago area will fail to meet tighter EPA standards, and this announcement highlights a major threat to the more than 435,000 Cook County residents who have asthma.

Nitrogen dioxide is emitted by coal-fired power plants, large industrial facilities and vehicle traffic, which collectively cause Chicago's high levels. Studies show that exposure to elevated NO₂ levels causes increased visits to emergency rooms and increased hospital admissions for respiratory illnesses, and NO₂ may interfere with effectiveness of medicine delivered by asthma inhalers.¹ Heightened levels may also contribute to Chicago's asthma hospitalization rate, which is nearly double the national average.

"The science showing the health danger posed by air pollution has been ignored or dismissed for far too long," said Brian Urbaszewski, director of environmental health programs for Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago. "EPA must ensure that the public is aware of harmful air pollution levels and prioritize efforts to sharply reduce nitrogen dioxide levels."

In 2009, Chicago tightened anti-idling regulations for diesel vehicles and the state increased fines for excessive idling. These steps reduce NO₂ emissions, but they aren't doing enough. In urban areas such as Chicago, nitrogen dioxide concentrations in vehicles can be two to three times higher than those measured at monitoring sites in surrounding residential areas. Near-road (within about 150 feet of a major roadway) concentrations of NO₂ have been measured as 30 to 100 percent higher than concentrations farther away from major roadways, according to the U.S. EPA.

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Sources:

1. Agarwal, Kangna. "Air pollution hinders asthma drugs' efficacy." *The Med Guru*. 30 Dec. 2009. Web. 21 Jan. 2010. <<http://www.themedguru.com/20091230/newsfeature/air-pollution-hinders-asthma-drugs-efficacy-86131611.html>>.

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, chronic bronchitis and emphysema (COPD) and other lung diseases. For more information, visit www.lungchicago.org.

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