



**RESPIRATORY  
HEALTH  
ASSOCIATION<sup>SM</sup>**

*of Metropolitan Chicago*

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## Media Advisory: Interview Available

**WHAT:** U.S. EPA set a new air quality standard today for nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) concentrations. Cook County has the highest average hourly nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) concentrations measured in the United States, posing a major health threat to everyone, especially people who have lung disease.

**AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW:** Brian Urbaszewski—Director of Environmental Health Programs, Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago. Contact at 1440 West Washington Boulevard, Chicago or by phone (312) 628-0245.

**WHY:** This announcement highlights a major threat to the more than 435,000 Cook County residents who have asthma. Studies show that exposure to elevated NO<sub>2</sub> levels causes increased visits to emergency rooms and increased hospital admissions for respiratory illnesses, and recent studies also show NO<sub>2</sub> may interfere with effectiveness of medicine delivered by asthma inhalers. Heightened levels may also contribute to Chicago's asthma hospitalization rate, which is nearly double the national average.

**STATEMENT:** The new standard alerts federal and state officials to the need for stricter emissions policies. NO<sub>2</sub> is released by burning fuel, and coal-fired power plants, large industrial facilities and vehicle traffic, which collectively cause Chicago's high levels.

"Unfortunately, the new health standard is not as strong as it should be," said Brian Urbaszewski, director of environmental health programs for RHAMC. "We are disappointed that given a range of options EPA proposed last year for where the NO<sub>2</sub> standard should be set, the agency chose the least protective health standard."

Because vehicle traffic is the single largest source of NO<sub>2</sub>, the EPA is also adding NO<sub>2</sub> air monitoring stations along major roads in urban areas nationwide. This will give the public a much clearer picture of the air quality in communities near roadways and during daily commutes.

"For years, the science showing the health dangers posed by air pollution has been ignored or dismissed," said Urbaszewski. "Rather than being kept in the dark the public must be given accurate information they need to protect their families. People are in danger in from the air they are breathing. Policies to sharply reduce air pollution are needed to protect the public's health."

Existing federal rules for new diesel and gasoline vehicles will help reduce NO<sub>2</sub> levels as new vehicles replace more highly polluting vehicles. Additional strategies such as vigorous enforcement of state and local diesel vehicle idling restrictions, requiring more effective NO<sub>2</sub> pollution controls on coal-fired power plants and industrial facilities, and improved public transit and land use planning to provide practical alternatives to automobile dependence will help to achieve better air quality in Chicagoland.

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