



NEWS RELEASE

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Wisconsinites March Backwards to Tell Bush Administration: “You’re Headed in the Wrong Direction”

New Study Shows Wisconsin Air 10th Most Polluted

Racine— Citizens took to the streets at West Park today, marching backwards to draw attention to the fact that the Bush administration is reversing 30 years of environmental progress and endangering public health while a new study shows Wisconsin air is among nation’s most polluted.

“The Bush administration is putting our communities at risk and taking us backwards to an era of dirtier air and water,” said Jennifer Feyerherm, representative for the Sierra Club’s Great Lakes Program. “Wisconsinites want to send a clear message to this administration: stop putting polluters before the public.”

The backwards marchers were particularly concerned about a proposed new coal-fired power plant just north of town.

“This administration has repeatedly weakened our clean air standards and let polluters off the hook. If this plant gets built, and the Bush administration continues reversing our environmental protections, our children will be at a huge risk,” said Feyerherm.

The new PIRG report, “Danger in the Air,” showed that Wisconsin air is the 10th most polluted in the country. Milwaukee-Racine at 24th most polluted for large metro areas, Green Bay at 22nd and Madison at 66th for mid-sized cities, Manitowoc at 15th and Sheboygan at 36th for Small cities. Close proximity to a coal-fired power plant does not only put kids at higher risk of asthma, it also means more exposure to mercury contamination. Maximum exceedance levels in Milwaukee in 2003 was 12% worse than Chicago.

Mercury causes serious developmental disorders and is a poisonous by-product of coal-fired power plants, where it rains down into rivers and lakes, is consumed by fish, and then by the people who eat those fish. Although mercury poses a serious risk to young children and women of childbearing age, the Bush administration is proposing to allow more mercury into our air, and delay cleanup for another ten years.



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Participants wore runners' bibs with numbers on them that represented ways in which the Bush administration policies are putting communities at risk and taking us backwards, such as 25 % increase in asthma, and 10 year delay in reducing mercury.

"Fortunately, there is a better way," said Feyerherm. "The American people have the desire and the vision to move forwards—if only the administration would stop putting polluters before the public. We know that our existing environmental protections work—we just need to enforce them, for our families, for our future."

The "Danger in the Air" report is available at
<http://uspirg.org/uspig.asp?id2=14418&id3=USPIRG&>.

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Other sources on public health threats under the Bush administration:

American Lung Assn gives Racine county an F for ozone pollution, which contributes to asthma and other respiratory diseases. "Despite this alarming situation, legislation has been introduced in Congress that will weaken and delay enforcement of the Clean Air Act. H.R. 999/S.485, the Administration's Clear Skies Act, will repeal key Clean Air Act enforcement programs, limit the ability of states to protect their citizens from air pollution and sentence another generation of Americans to breathing dirty air by delaying the needed pollution reductions for decades. Simply enforcing the current Clean Air Act will provide greater pollution reductions sooner than the Administration's plan." <http://lungaction.org/campaign/stateoftheair2004>

The **American Heart Association's** Scientific Statement on "Air Pollution and Cardiovascular Disease" is just out: <http://circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/reprint/109/21/2655>

The statement supports for stringent NAAQS for PM2.5. Among its findings:

"... In light of these data, there is a clear potential to improve the national public health and to substantially reduce cardiovascular morbidity and mortality by reducing PM levels to current EPA standards...the existing body of evidence is adequately consistent, coherent, and plausible enough to draw several conclusions. At the very least, short-term exposure to elevated PM significantly contributes to increased acute cardiovascular mortality, particularly in certain-at-risk subsets of the population. Hospital admissions for several cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases acutely increase in response to higher ambient PM concentrations. The evidence further implicates prolonged exposure to elevated levels of PM in reducing overall life expectancy on the order of a few years."

"On the basis of these conclusions and the potential to improve the public health, the AHA writing group supports the promulgation and implementation of regulations to expedite the attainment of the existing National Ambient Air Quality Standards. Moreover, because a number of studies have



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demonstrated associations between particulate air pollution and adverse cardiovascular effects even when levels of ambient PM_{2.5} were within current standards, even more stringent standards for PM_{2.5} should be strongly considered by the EPA."

The **Environmental Protection Agency** estimates that today, through the consumption of mercury-contaminated fish, one in six women of childbearing age has enough mercury in her blood to put her baby at risk. More than 600,000 children born each year are exposed to dangerous levels of this nerve toxin that could impair the development of their central nervous systems and put them at risk of long-term mental and behavioral disorders, approximately 11,000 children in Wisconsin are at risk .

Old, dirty coal plants still provide most of America's energy supply and are the largest source of mercury contamination. The Clean Air Act requires electric utilities to reduce mercury emissions from all coal plants by 90 percent in 2007. The new Bush administration proposals would push that deadline back a full decade to 2018, and would weaken the reductions to 70 percent. That means Americans will not only be exposed to over 300 tons more mercury pollution than the Clean Air Act allows, but we may not see any mercury reductions for at least 15 years.