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Science Panel Rejects EPA Plan to Make Air Standards Even Stricter

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Posted: Thursday, March 13, 1997

PRESS RELEASE
Publication Date: March 13, 1997

The American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) today opposed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s proposed changes to ambient air quality standards for ozone and its adoption of a standard for "fine" particulate matter (referred to as "PM2.5"). ACSH President Dr. Elizabeth M. Whelan declared that "there is no public health benefit to be gained from the proposed stricter standards. Furthermore, adoption of the proposed standards will place severe economic burdens on hundreds of counties throughout the U.S. and on U.S. industry—burdens that will be passed on in the form of higher costs to consumers without any identifiable benefit in return."

In letters to the EPA, ACSH scientists took issue with the agency's reliance on studies that are inadequate for showing a causal relationship between high air concentrations of ozone and particulates and various measures of adverse health effects and mortality. The studies used by the EPA rely on outdoor monitoring stations for "exposure" data, failing to account for the major differences between indoor and outdoor air concentrations and the fact that most of our time is spent indoors. Furthermore, in most cases, there are no monitoring data for fine particulates. Thus, the EPA is proposing a standard in the absence of information as to what exposures people are receiving.

Cindy F. Kleiman, MPH, Coordinator of Toxicology Projects for ACSH, stated that "the EPA has ignored a claim by one of the researchers that it is premature to single out a specific air pollution component, such as fine particulates, as being responsible for mortality. Nor is there consistent evidence to support EPA's claim that lowering of the ozone standard is needed to protect asthmatics. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control has not implicated outdoor ozone as a primary factor in recent increases in asthma occurrence."

According to Dr. Whelan, "It is misleading to couch the debate in terms of big business versus public health. Asthma and other respiratory diseases are serious problems in the U.S. But not only will the proposed standards fail to address these problems, they may also—by creating economic disruption—actually worsen them by lowering living standards and reducing access to health care."

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