

March 20, 2012

To Members of the NC Legislature:

As North Carolina medical professionals, we are writing to you with concern about recent reports that state legislators may be considering dismantling or weakening the crucial Air Toxics Program in North Carolina. The EPA links exposure to toxic air pollution to fetal death, cancer, pediatric respiratory disease, adult respiratory and cardiac disease and premature death. Children, pregnant women, and senior citizens are at risk for serious health problems if the air they breathe is contaminated by nearby industrial emissions – emissions that they are powerless to control.

When drafting the North Carolina rules in 1990, our state's Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) identified toxic air pollutants emitted in North Carolina that could harm the health of North Carolinians. During 2010, North Carolina industries self-reported releasing over 34 million pounds of toxic substances and nearly 1.5 million pounds of cancer causing chemicals in air emissions. These emissions included PCBs, dioxins, asbestos, arsenic, cadmium, hexavalent chromium, mercury, selenium, formaldehyde, cyanide, benzene, toluene and dozens of known carcinogens that are covered by existing state regulations designed to protect the public health.

The intent of the air toxics program – which is distinct from technology-based federal programs aimed at toxins of concern on a national level – is safeguarding the health of North Carolinians, by protecting communities near heavy industry from exposure to levels of toxic air pollutants that have been determined to create harmful health effects. And the program is working. Since adoption of the rules, there has been a steady decline in reported toxic air emissions—emissions reported in 2009 were about one-third the levels reported in 1998.

Federal rules are source-specific and do not address all emission sources at a facility. For example, federal rules for pulp and paper mills don't cover sources that account for about 37% of facility-wide toxic air emissions. In addition, federal rules set standards for only a limited number of pollutants and do not address all air toxics. In the case of pulp and paper mills, these rules do not cover 11 compounds such as ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and methyl mercaptan that are evaluated under the state program because they are considered a health threat locally, despite not rising to the concern level nationally.

Now is *not* the time to weaken North Carolina's protective Air Toxics Program. North Carolina's natural beauty and clean air make this state a destination for families, tourists, and business investments. Having more toxic air pollutants in the air we breathe will only diminish our state's appeal and will certainly decrease public health, especially for seniors, children, and those with existing medical conditions.

If the legislature's attempts to weaken the Air Toxics Program are successful, it will be paid for by personal health tragedies and medical expenses for many families in North Carolina. These costs are assessed to the people of the state and are shown to far outweigh any additional administrative costs the program may place on the polluters themselves.

Sincerely,

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