

AIR POLLUTION AND CANCER IN MICHIGAN

It's official: breathing dirty air causes cancer. According to recent findings, outdoor air pollution and particulate matter both cause cancer in humans. We've known for a long time that certain kinds of outdoor air pollution can cause heart and lung diseases, premature death, asthma attacks and other harmful health effects, but the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) recently concluded that outdoor air pollution causes lung cancer and is linked to increased risk for bladder cancer.

- The IARC, a branch of the World Health Organization (WHO), classified outdoor air pollution as a carcinogen in October 2013. This puts air pollution in the same category as tobacco smoke and UV radiation.
- Specific components of air pollution have long been known to be cancer-causing carcinogens, including diesel engine exhaust, solvents, metals and dust. But these new findings combined strong scientific evidence from over 1000 studies from across 5 continents to conclude that air pollution as a whole is a cancer-causing carcinogen.
- Another major component of outdoor air pollution—called particulate matter—was also recently labeled as a carcinogen. Particulate matter is a combination of extremely small solid particles and liquid droplets that are found in the air and enter the bloodstream. These particles are produced from sources like coal-fired power plants.

Air Pollution and Your Health

- Air pollution is a highly dangerous environmental cause of cancer because it can expose a large amount of people at one time to cancer-causing carcinogens. Unlike smoking or other behaviors, outdoor air pollution is almost impossible to avoid. Creating policy in support of cleaner air is the only way to ensure that we are all protected from cancers caused by dirty air.
- In areas with high air pollution, the risk of getting lung cancer from pollution is similar to levels associated with passive smoking. People exposed to high levels of air pollution are 50% more likely to develop air pollution caused lung cancer than those at lower levels. Everyone exposed to air pollution is at risk, but people living closer to coal-fired power plants, are at a greater risk.
- Outdoor air pollution from particulate matter and other forms of outdoor air pollution caused the premature death of 3.7 million people worldwide in 2012 due to lung cancer, heart disease and other cancers.

A Healthier and Cleaner Future is Possible

Air pollution poses a health risk for millions of Michiganders. Transitioning to clean energy sources and being more energy efficient will reduce air pollution across Michigan. This will give our communities cleaner and healthier air, reduce rates of cancer, and save money and lives.

Here are two ways we can get there:

1. Tell your Michigan legislators that we can and should think of ways to increase the amount of renewable energy and energy efficiency we use in our state. After all, our energy policy can protect our health.
2. The EPA Clean Power Plan will reduce dangerous pollution that causes asthma attacks, as well as heart disease, cancer and premature death. Ask Governor Snyder to support the Clean Power Plan so that we can smooth our transition to clean, renewable energy.



ABOUT MI AIR, MI HEALTH

The MI Air, MI Health Coalition works to ensure that all Michigan communities have clean, healthy air. We organize health professionals to advocate for policies that improve outdoor air quality, and improve a range of health impacts caused by unhealthy outdoor air and climate change, and reduce the healthcare costs we bear because of unhealthy outdoor air.

OUR MISSION

MI Air, MI Health is committed to ensuring healthy air for Michigan communities by assessing the health effects of air quality and advocating for the development, implementation, and enforcement of policies to address these issues, recognizing that clean air contributes to a healthy economy.

To learn more, contact Rory Neuner, MI Air, MI Health Coordinator at rory@miairmihealth.org.



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