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**Fairbanks Residents Notify EPA of Intent to Sue for Turning Blind Eye to Dirty Air**

*Community groups frustrated with failure to address dirty air, some of the worst in the nation*

**Fairbanks, AK** — The Fairbanks North Star Borough has some of the worst and most dangerous air quality in the nation. Today, Alaska community groups joined together to demand that responsible officials address the problems that Borough residents and their families face when simply breathing in Fairbanks.

Citizens for Clean Air, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, and the Sierra Club sent a letter calling on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to compel the State of Alaska to produce a long-overdue and legally mandated plan to address air pollution in Fairbanks. The State was required under the Clean Air Act to develop a plan by June of 2011 to combat the unhealthy air, a deadline the State has failed to meet. Rather than require Alaska to submit its late plan, EPA irresponsibly has proposed to extend the deadline. The letter, submitted by environmental law firm Earthjustice's Alaska office, notified EPA of the community groups' intent to sue if EPA does not correct its course and comply with the law in 60 days.

The [American Lung Association ranked Fairbanks](#) as the ninth dirtiest of 227 metropolitan areas for the deadliest form of fine particle pollution (PM-2.5), a type of air pollution that can penetrate deeply into a person's lungs and enter their bloodstream. Sources of PM-2.5 in Fairbanks include outdoor burning; wood- and coal-burning heating devices; automobiles and other vehicles; and industrial facilities like coal-fired power plants. Last winter, the greater Fairbanks area logged more than 50 days that exceeded legal health limits for air pollution. The air pollution problems have worsened since 2009, when state and municipal officials were first advised that soot and smoke levels in Fairbanks were unhealthy and dangerous.

More than a thousand health studies have shown that PM-2.5 air pollution causes a wide range of serious health problems, including asthma attacks, chronic respiratory disease, reduction in lung function, hospitalizations and emergency room visits for cardiopulmonary diseases, cancer, and even premature death. One study, [conducted by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services](#), found that poor air quality led to increased admissions for cerebrovascular disease and respiratory tract infections at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital. PM-2.5 air pollution is of particular danger to children, reducing lung development, causing asthma, and impairing the immune system. The elderly and those with chronic disease also face heightened risk.

**The following are statements from the groups:**

**“Children are the most vulnerable to harm caused by the air pollution in Fairbanks,” said Pamela K. Miller, Executive Director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics.** “Studies show that our children are in grave danger from the severe air pollution—they are susceptible to more frequent asthma attacks, their lungs may be unable to develop fully, their energy for learning, exercise, and play is diminished, and their lives are shortened by degenerative heart failure. We have to ask the Borough, our State, and EPA to do better—because we simply can’t continue to allow our children to suffer this harm. It is time for urgent and responsible action.”

**Said Bernice Gibson, a mother, grandmother, and great grandmother:** “I am concerned that my daughter, grandchildren, and great grandbabies are trapped in a sea of air pollution in Fairbanks. I am particularly concerned for a grandson who developed a heart condition that makes the poor air quality very dangerous and limiting for him. The known effects of this pollution are bad enough. What about those not yet identified? Each new study suggests that PM-2.5 is even more harmful than we understood previously.”

**Dr. Jeanne Olson, a North Pole Veterinarian said:** “Heavy smoke chronically inundates a group of area neighborhoods so consistently that it has been nicknamed ‘the Rectangle of Death.’ We are not asking for special treatment. We are merely insisting that our government follows the law established to protect our citizens from poisons in the air we need to breathe.”

**Said Lou Brown, a Co-Coordinator of Citizens for Clean Air:** “Other communities in the nation have made progress to improve their air quality and make their cities healthy places to live. State of Alaska officials, by contrast, have done almost nothing to address the severe and dangerous air quality—with EPA complicit in their inaction. The State recently proposed new regulations that do too little to clean up the air pollution. And if past is prologue, it is unlikely that the State will finalize these or other necessary measures anytime soon. In the meantime, the failure to act is hurting the health and welfare of children and families.”

**Said Michele Hebert-Mouton, local gardener and member of Citizens for Clean Air:** “The inaction is frustrating because solutions are available that put public health first and also save money. Clean-burning heating devices are readily available in Fairbanks and are no more expensive than the dirty models. These efficient devices save their owners money over time with lower fuel use and help prevent the expense of hospitalization from illness. It is common sense to require a move toward cleaner stoves. It is also the neighborly thing to do.”

**Sharon Baring, a school nurse and former public health nurse in Fairbanks, said:** “Missed school days and work days from prolonged and repeated colds and bronchitis, asthma flares, irregular heartbeats and fatigue—the quality of what we breathe is contributing to these. We all pay, if not in illness directly, then for the increased medical expenses and lost productivity that come from them.”

**ONLINE VERSION OF THIS STATEMENT:** <http://bit.ly/Overdue4CleanAir>

**ONLINE VERSION OF NOTICE LETTER:** <http://bit.ly/CleanAir60dayNotice>

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*Citizens for Clean Air is a coalition of local community members and citizens groups in Fairbanks, Alaska who are committed to cleaning up the air while keeping everyone warm in the winter.*

*Alaska Community Action on Toxics is a non-profit environmental health research and advocacy organization whose mission is to assure justice by advocating for environmental and community health. We believe that everyone has a right to clean air, clean water and toxic-free food. For more information, visit <http://www.akaction.org>.*

*The Sierra Club is America's largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization, with more than 2.1 million members and supporters nationwide including Fairbanks, Alaska. The Sierra Club works to protect the things Alaskans value such as salmon and the great outdoors, and to safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and litigation. For more information, visit <http://www.sierraclub.org>.*