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Groups Sue Trump Admin. for Risking Americans' Health by Suspending Transportation Clean Air Safeguards

WASHINGTON, D.C. (July 31, 2017) –The Trump administration put Americans' health at risk by abruptly suspending a federal safeguard intended to curb a major source of climate-changing emissions, the pollution from cars and trucks on the national highways, according to a lawsuit filed today.

The Natural Resources Defense Council, U.S. PIRG, and the Southern Environmental Law Center on behalf of Clean Air Carolina, are suing the Federal Highway Administration today for illegally suspending the clean air standard this year, and are seeking its immediate reinstatement.

"The Trump administration broke the law by hitting the brakes on sensible transportation clear air standards. We need them to protect our health today and to reduce climate chaos tomorrow," said Deron Lovaas, NRDC senior policy adviser.

Trip Pollard, senior attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center, said, "This move is one of many recent examples of the White House and its agencies unlawfully ignoring procedures as it systematically attempts to remove environmental protections and suppress collection of vital climate change data."

The standard was designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions –including carbon pollution – from major highway transportation sources. That could, in turn, help slow climate change—already seen in rising seas, stronger storms and poorer air quality—and reduce ground-level ozone and other harmful pollutants that worsen respiratory illnesses such as asthma.

The standard also could drive communities nationwide to provide smarter, cleaner transportation options, including public transportation, carpooling, vanpooling, and safer streets for walking and biking. "Soaring car and truck traffic in our transportation system generates an enormous amount of harmful emissions that pollute the air we breathe and contributes to global climate change," said Matthew Casale, U.S. PIRG transportation advocate. "This clean air standard would require state and local governments to change course and take more seriously the need for investment in cleaner modes of transportation."

June Blotnick, executive director of Clean Air Carolina, said. "In the Southeast groups like ours have long battled poor air quality and soaring greenhouse gas emissions. The GHG measure was meant to usher in smarter 21st Century transportation options for our communities. It will help put us on the right road to protect our children, and all future generations, from dangerous climate change and unhealthy air."



Amanda Eaken, director of transportation and climate at NRDC, added: “The U.S. needs to curb greenhouse gas emissions from one of the largest contributors to climate change – our transportation sector. That will help Americans breathe easier.”

The groups filed their lawsuit in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, arguing that the Trump administration ignored requirements under the federal Administrative Procedure Act when it suspended the transportation greenhouse gas standard. The suit asks the court to invalidate the suspension, meaning that the standard would go into immediate effect.

The Highway Administration in 2014 began developing new standards under the 2012 Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act, (MAP-21). In 2016, the agency issued transportation standards for safety and solicited public comment on whether and how to establish a standard for greenhouse gas emissions.

Nine state departments of transportation, 24 metropolitan planning organizations, more than 100 cities, 67 members of Congress, more than 100 public interest organizations—including plaintiffs NRDC and U.S. PIRG—and almost 100,000 individuals commented in favor of a greenhouse gas standard. The Highway Administration agreed with many of those comments and issued a final greenhouse gas standard on January 18, 2017.

But once in office, the Trump administration issued notices delaying the implementation of the standard and indefinitely suspending it on May 19.

Under it, roughly 400 state departments of transportation and metropolitan planning organizations must track the annual amount (in tons) of carbon dioxide emitted from on-road vehicles traveling on the national highway system. They also must set two- and/or four-year emissions-reduction targets, with the first targets to be submitted to the Highway Administration by February 20, 2018.

The transportation sector was the largest single source of carbon pollution in 2016, representing 36.4% of all U.S. carbon emissions. America’s transportation system produces more greenhouse gas pollution than the entire economy of any other nation on earth except China, India and Russia. U.S. transportation emissions are thus significant on a global scale.

Also, on-road vehicles are responsible for 38 percent of U.S. emissions of nitrogen oxides and 14 percent of U.S. emissions of volatile organic compounds, which in turn contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone, commonly known as smog.

These pollutants worsen air quality and exposure to them is associated with higher rates of respiratory disease, preterm birth, childhood cancer, and premature death. People living or working near major highways—especially children, elderly adults, and individuals with preexisting health conditions—are particularly at risk, science shows.

The lawsuit is here: <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/transportation-ghg-lawsuit.pdf>

A blog by NRDC’s Deron Lovaas and Amanda Eaken is here: <https://www.nrdc.org/experts/amanda-eaken/were-suing-defend-key-transportation-rule>

More from the Southern Environmental Law Center here: <https://www.southernenvironment.org/news-and-press/news-feed>

A 2016 poll showing broad support for the clean air transportation standard is here: <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/attitudesairpollutionfuelefficiency.pdf>

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The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 2 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world's natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City; Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles; San Francisco; Chicago; Bozeman, Montana; and Beijing. Visit us at www.nrdc.org and follow us on Twitter @NRDC.

The Southern Environmental Law Center is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. With nine offices across the region (Charlottesville, VA; Chapel Hill, NC; Atlanta, GA; Charleston, SC; Washington, DC; Birmingham, AL; Nashville, TN; Asheville, NC; and Richmond, VA), SELC is widely recognized as the Southeast's foremost environmental organization and regional leader. SELC works on a full range of environmental issues to protect the South's natural resources and the health and well-being of all the people in our region. www.SouthernEnvironment.org

Clean Air Carolina is a statewide nonprofit advocacy group based in Charlotte, NC with a satellite office in the Triangle. Our mission is to ensure cleaner air quality for all North Carolinians through education and advocacy and by working with our partners to reduce sources of pollution. Major initiatives include AirKeepers Citizen Science Program, Medical Advocates for Healthy Air, and Clear the Air for Kids. www.CleanAirCarolina.org

U.S. PIRG is the federation of state Public Interest Research Groups. PIRGs are non-profit, non-partisan public interest advocacy organizations that stand up to powerful interests whenever they threaten our health and safety, our financial security, or our right to fully participate in our democratic society. On the web at www.uspirg.org.