

Tuesday, March 25, 2014

To members of the Michigan Senate Energy and Technology Committee:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations, we thank you for your time and attention to the important issues of renewable energy and efficiency. We write today on behalf of a diverse set of health organizations that represent the doctors, nurses, and scientists who work every day to keep Michigan families healthy and safe. The health professionals we represent support an energy policy that focuses on moving toward more clean, renewable sources of energy because doing so will reduce illness, rein in health care costs, and save lives.

We don't often talk about health and energy policy at the same time. But it is time we recognize that the two are connected. In fact, transitioning to cleaner sources of energy and eliminating energy waste will reduce pollution and give Michigan cleaner and healthier air.

Michigan currently gets more than half of its electricity from coal. The coal plants scattered across our state emit dangerous levels of mercury, arsenic and lead, toxic substances that, when inhaled, are linked to four of the five leading causes of mortality in the U.S.: heart disease, cancer, stroke, and chronic respiratory diseases, such as asthma. We know the burden these plants have on both our health and our pocket books. Michigan currently rank 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation in premature deaths, hospital admissions, and heart attacks attributed to coal-fired power plant pollution. Michiganders spend more than \$1.3 billion per year in Michigan on health care costs related to the air quality impacts of coal pollution. More specifically, the pollution from Michigan's nine oldest coal-fired power plants has been linked to 68,000 cases of asthma attacks and 180 premature deaths each year.

Despite these grim statistics, a healthier and cleaner future is possible. Recent reports by the Michigan Public Service Commission show that Michigan is on track achieve a 30% renewable energy standard and that we have enormous potential to reduce energy waste. By transitioning to cleaner, renewable sources of energy, we can ensure that the 229,000 children and 750,000 adults in Michigan with asthma can breathe cleaner and healthier air. This has a clear return on investment: by reducing the instances of illness related to pollution, we can cut down on lost productivity from kids and adults missing school or work because they are in the hospital from asthma complications. We can also significantly reduce the amount of uncompensated care costs that hospitals and health clinics have to assume as a result.

The Renewable Portfolio Standard legislation passed in 2008 has helped improve the health of children and families across Michigan. We urge you to keep the health of Michiganders at the center of your debate on our state's future energy policy. There are ways to connect energy policy to health, whether it is by increasing our state's use of clean, renewable energy, or by adding health care cost considerations to our state's energy production decision-making process. Finally, we underscore the need to include energy efficiency as a low cost accessible solution to mitigate negative health impacts.

The attached fact sheet shows health facts and figures, as well as data sources. We look forward to working with you to draft a plan for Michigan's energy future that will protect the health of Michigan kids, seniors and families.

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact any of the undersigned groups with questions.

Signed,

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Stephanie Dernek, Director, Physicians for Social Responsibility - Michigan Chapter

Alexis Blizman, Policy Director, Ecology Center

Tina Reynolds, Health Policy Director, Michigan Environmental Council

*Sources:*

- Environmental Health & Engineering, Inc. Study for the Michigan Environmental Council, 2011.
- American Lung Association, State of the Air Report, Michigan, 2013.
- Clean Air Task Force, The Toll from Coal Report, 2010.