

## National Hispanic Environmental Council



### STATEMENT OF THE NATIONAL HISPANIC ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL REGARDING THE U.S. EPA'S PROPOSED INDUSTRIAL CARBON POLLUTION STANDARD ON NEW POWER PLANTS

MAY 24, 2012  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Dear Administrator Jackson and Senior EPA officials,

I am Roger Rivera, President and Founder of the National Hispanic Environmental Council (NHEC), the only national Latino environmental and natural resource organization in the country. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and present NHEC's views on this critical public/environmental health and safety issue that impacts all Americans, **but in particular the over 50 million Americans who are Hispanic.**

**I am here today to express our strong support** for the Environmental Protection Agency's proposed landmark standard to reduce industrial carbon pollution from new power plants. In addition, we also urge the EPA to move forward with carbon pollution standards for existing plants, actions we know are also being considered by EPA.

The power sector is the largest source of carbon pollution in the U.S.—and one of the largest sources in the world. This sector generates nearly 40 percent of all greenhouse gases in the United States. Today, insufficiently regulated industrial carbon pollution from power plants is having a significant impact on our nation's public health. 154 million Americans already suffer air pollution levels that are too high and too dangerous.

According to a multitude of scientific studies, especially those from the prestigious Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change (IPCC), if greenhouse gas emissions are not reduced it is highly likely that Americans will experience the following: increased severity of dangerous smog in cities; hurricanes and storm surges; reduced precipitation and runoff in the arid West; reduced crop yields; increased fires; increases in diseases transmitted by food, water, and insects; and increased risk of illness and death due to extreme heat.

These studies have also amply demonstrated who is most at risk: this includes people with lung diseases such as asthma, chronic bronchitis, and emphysema; children – because their respiratory systems and related defenses are not fully developed; the elderly, due to their often overall poor health condition and heightened susceptibility to respiratory illness; and people who work outdoors. Regarding those working outdoors, millions of Latinos are employed in agriculture, construction, landscape, building trades, and many other occupations; thus clean air is vital to the health of millions of Latino workers who labor outside daily.

Several of the above at-risk groups are disproportionately Latino and as such are more vulnerable to the effects of air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. **Given this, I'd like to focus on the particular impacts to Hispanic Americans.**

First, as is now well known the 2010 census revealed that there are over 50 million Latinos in the United States. Our community is now 16 percent of the U.S. population and accounted for more than half the growth of the country's total population over the last 10 years. Latinos are now the largest minority group in the country.

Imbedded within this sweeping demographic change are a number of key socio-economic factors for the Latino community that our national policy-makers must keep at the forefront of their deliberations regarding this proposed carbon standard.

First, in 2009 the median age for Latinos was 27.4 years, compared to 36.8 years for the total population. Further, more than one-third of Latinos were younger than 18, compared to approximately one-fourth of the total population. Indeed, Hispanics are now the youngest population in the U.S.

Second, according to the 2010 Census, 25.3% of Hispanic Americans live in poverty, a total of 12.4 million people. Only African Americans exceeded that percentage, with 25.8 percent.

Third, Latinos have a significantly increased risk of developing acute and chronic illnesses like asthma and other pulmonary and respiratory diseases from exposure to air pollution. The reason is that **a disproportionate number of Latinos live in areas that fail to meet one or more federal standards for clean air.**

In a 2006 study co-sponsored by NHEC, it was found that 30 million Latinos – at that time 72% of all Hispanics in the U.S. – lived in areas that do not meet federal air pollution standards for one or more pollutants. Further, over 28 million Latinos lived in areas that did not meet the federal standard for ozone.

In 2010 the American Lung Association examined the 25 most polluted U.S. cities as measured by unhealthy levels of particulates, ozone, and other air pollution. In analyzing that data, the Center for American Progress found that fully 66% of U.S.

Latinos—25.6 million people—live in areas that do not meet the federal government’s safe air quality standards. Moreover, it found that 7 out of the 25 worst polluted U.S. cities have Latino populations over 40 percent. Indeed, the average Latino population in the 10 worst polluted U.S. cities is 33 %.

Fourth, it is a documented fact that low income and poor Latinos have far less access to quality health care, health insurance, and adequate housing. These conditions make our community especially vulnerable to climate change related illnesses, a reality that will only worsen should air pollution and greenhouse gases increase, as the IPCC projects.

**One particular scourge for the Latino community is asthma. Today, Latinos have some of the highest rates of asthma in the country.** According to a 2005 study by the CDC, 13% of all Latino children suffered from asthma; in 2009 the federal Office of Minority Health reported over 1.7 million Latinos have asthma. Indeed, Hispanic children are 60% more likely to have asthma compared to non-Hispanic whites. And for Puerto Rican children living in Puerto Rico, the asthma rate was an astounding 30%. There, the death rate from asthma is 2.5 times the rate of the mainland, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Finally, regarding health insurance, Latinos are among the most uninsured and under-insured population in the U.S. Estimates are that in 2010, **39% of all Latinos lacked health insurance, with 25% of Latino children being uninsured.** Further, the uninsured are three times more likely than those with insurance to report problems getting needed medical care and are less likely to receive preventative care.

For all these reasons, the proposed EPA industrial carbon pollution standard is absolutely vital to the public health, wellness, and safety of the Latino community. **NHEC urges EPA to move at the fastest possible speed to implement this much needed standard.** Thank you.

Roger Rivera  
President, National Hispanic Environmental Council

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