

The Clean Air We All Deserve

Our access to clean air depends on where we live and work

BY THE ISNA GREEN INITIATIVE TEAM

WE ALL DESERVE TO BREATHE clean air, for it's one of life's basic needs.

Few things are more frightening than being unable to get enough air. However, because of persistent indoor and outdoor air pollution, people all over the world suffer daily from acute respiratory health problems.

This May, we celebrate Clean Air Month. Clean air is critical to human and ecosystem health. Poor air quality affects people of all ages, especially those who have asthma or heart conditions, work and exercise outdoors, as well as elders and children.

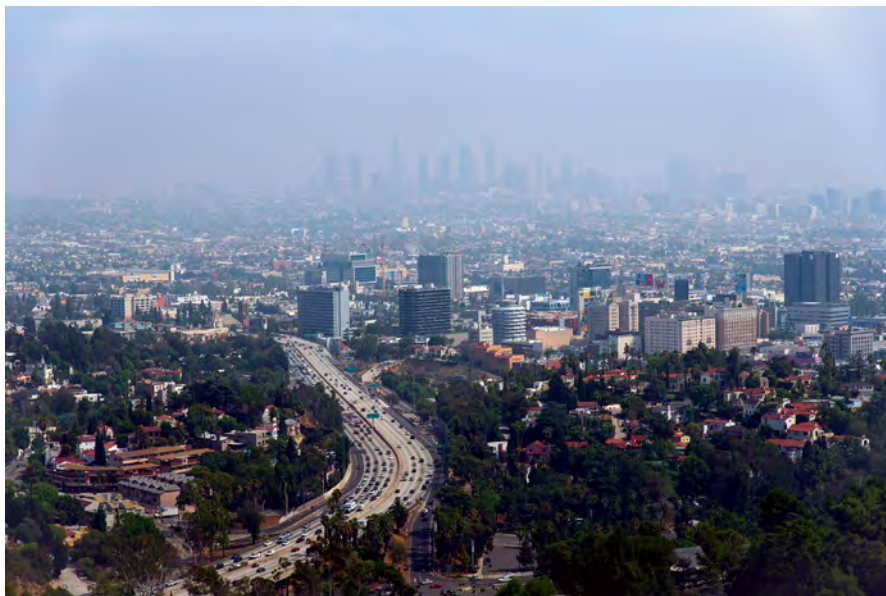
Clean Air Month started as a week-long event in 1972 and evolved into a month-long one in 1994. Its awareness campaigns seek to educate everyone about the impact of air pollutants and encourage people to take steps to improve air quality, both locally and globally.

We can't always see or smell toxic air pollutants, but their health impacts are very real. Air pollution is responsible for over 100,000 deaths in the U.S. each year and leads to heart disease, lung cancer, asthma, stroke, low birth weight, premature birth and other problems.

The Clean Air Act (CAA), passed in 1970, was the first comprehensive federal law designed to crack down on polluting air emissions from stationary and mobile sources. Among other things, it authorizes the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to establish National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to protect public health and welfare and to regulate other hazardous air pollutants.

AIR POLLUTION DOES DISCRIMINATE

According to a 2021 EPA study, people of color are more exposed to harmful particulate air pollution than white people, with racial disparities persisting regardless of income. Much of this is related to where people live and which communities bear the brunt of air pollution. People of color are more likely to live near power plants, major roadways and



manufacturing plants and thus face a higher risk of premature death from air pollution.

Truck pollution is another huge problem that harms everyone, especially those who live close to highways, ports, freight hubs and other high-traffic areas. Toxic diesel truck fumes contribute to lethal particulate and ozone pollution, thereby threatening the health of millions. Heavy-duty vehicles also spew dangerous nitrogen oxides and other pollution, harming respiratory health, especially in marginalized communities located near freight routes.

Toxic soot hurts millions and puts predominantly black and brown communities at a greater health risk than any other population. It's time to fight back against big

polluters who want a free pass to release toxic soot pollution from dirty fossil fuel-fired power plants and other industrial sources.

► Soot pollution, also known as particulate matter or PM_{2.5}, poses a special danger for children, seniors and people with chronic illnesses.

► These particles, about 1/36th the size of a grain of sand, can be inhaled and delivered directly to our bloodstream. Exposure to soot has been linked to asthma, heart disease, COPD, Parkinson's, dementia, low birth weight, greater risk of preterm birth and higher rates of infant mortality health risks and chronic conditions.

► According to the American Lung Association, 63 million Americans are

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exposed to repeated short-term spikes in soot pollution each year, and many, including more than 20 million Americans suffer dangerous levels of soot pollution on a year-round basis.

The current standards for soot pollution, which haven't been updated since 2012, are insufficient to protect our health or the environment. Stronger updated limits (i.e., no higher than 8 mcg/m³ annual and 25 mcg/m³ daily) can save nearly 20,000 lives each year. An even stronger soot standard is expected in black and brown communities, which are often overburdened by pollution, to at least partially end some of the well-known racial disparities in health outcomes. Finally, tightening soot protections will also reduce other dangerous pollution from these sources. The EPA must take bold action if we are to meet President Biden's stated commitments to cut dangerous pollution and protect our health and environment.

Biden promised to address the climate crisis by cutting climate pollution in half by 2030 and delivering strong public health protections for *all* communities. Even with the historic investments in climate and clean energy, the Inflation Reduction Act doesn't get us all the way to this goal.

The ISNA Green Initiative Team calls on the Biden administration to carry out its responsibilities under our nation's bedrock environmental laws, like the Clean Air Act, by advancing protections across federal agencies that will help the president to keep his promise.

We need him to use every authority he has to meet this commitment. That means that the EPA, the Department of Energy and other federal agencies must set strong standards to clean up power plants, transportation and other sources of pollution. Implementing strong solutions will protect our health and environment, advance environmental justice and promote clean energy sources like wind and solar to power the U.S. into the future.

These solutions to pollution will help advance the president's public health and environmental justice goals, accelerate the transition to clean energy and create new economic opportunities for all. That's why we call out to President Biden and EPA Administrator Michael Regan, "Please don't leave our communities behind. Let us breathe clean air." 

The ISNA Green Initiative Team comprises Huda Alkaff, Saffet Catovic, Nana Firman, Uzma Mirza and Saiyid Masroor Shah (chair)