

Senator Tom Carper Hearing Statement
EPW Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety:
Examining Pathways Towards Compliance of the National Ambient Air
Quality Standard for Ground-Level Ozone
June 22, 2016

“I would like to thank the Chairman for having this hearing today and thank our witnesses for taking the time to be here. Today is a monumental day. This morning, many of my colleagues and I had the privilege to witness the signing of a major piece of environmental legislation – the Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act was signed into law, which overhauls a 40-year-old law that regulates thousands of chemicals used in products Americans rely on every day.

“The bill that was signed today, builds off the work done by the late Senator Frank Lautenberg, who was a true champion of chemical safety. I think it is fitting that on the same day, our subcommittee discusses another of Senator Lautenberg’s passions – clean air.

“For years, Senator Lautenberg and I sat together on this committee fighting for cleaner air for all Americans. We both represented states whose residents live in what I like to call ‘America’s tailpipe.’ Other states’ dirty emissions from cars and power plants drift east to our states, impacting the health of our constituents.

For Senator Lautenberg, the fight was deeply personal. It is hard to forget his story. His sister was diagnosed with asthma and had a machine in her car that would help her breath during asthma attacks. One day at a school board meeting, his sister felt an asthma attack coming on. She raced to her car to get to her machine. Tragically, she didn’t make it in time and as a result passed away.

“I wish this was unique case – but sadly, there are thousands of mothers, fathers, brothers and grandparents in this country that have lost a loved one because of asthma.

“Millions in this country are living with asthma. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 6.3 million children in this country have been diagnosed with asthma. That means that more than six million children worry every day if they will make it to their inhaler in time if they have an asthma attack.

“For decades, we have known that ozone pollution is linked to serious health problems like asthma attacks, strokes, heart attacks and other respiratory ailments. More recently, ozone even has been linked to early deaths.

“Since 1970, Congress has asked EPA to provide the country with national health standards protecting Americans from the most harmful and common air pollutants.

The EPA promptly did so in 1971, setting the first national health standard that covered ozone pollution. Congress wanted to make sure the ozone health standard reflected the best science available, which is why Congress required the EPA to review the standard every five years.

“Last year, the EPA finished its congressionally mandated review of the 2008 ozone health standard. After reviewing more than a thousand scientific studies, the EPA has concluded the 2008 ozone health standard was too weak and no longer adequately protected public health.

Despite what many may say today, the EPA’s rule is purely a statement of fact – to protect our health, we need less ozone pollution. To protect the 6.3 million children with asthma, we need less ozone pollution in our air. Fortunately, many of today’s biggest emitters of ozone pollution – such as old coal plants and older diesel engines – are already scheduled to be cleaned up. This means the costs of compliance are not as high as they might have been two, four or six years ago.

Since Senator Lautenberg's sister passed away over thirty years ago, we have made remarkable progress in cleaning up harmful ozone air pollution. But let us honor her memory by never letting the challenge we face to ensure our air is clean and healthy for children and adults alike slip out of sight. Advances in science and the technology we use to understand what is making our air dirty has given us a more thorough understanding of how we can make the atmosphere safe for everyone. We must now seize the opportunity – which is really a not an opportunity at all, but rather a responsibility – to do a good job today of cleaning up our air so that the generations of tomorrow can live healthier and longer lives.”

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