STATEMENT OF POLICY

Pollution Prevention

Policy
The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) urges national, state, and local health departments (LHDs) and related agencies to engage policymakers, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and communities to produce and support policies, legislation, regulations, programs, research, and resources that prevent or reduce pollution.

NACCHO supports activities to prevent or reduce pollution, including the following:

- Eliminating or reducing pollution at its source, including the emission of greenhouse gases.
- Supporting renewable and least-polluting energy production.
- Supporting energy efficiency and conservation.
- Supporting the use of non-toxic or least-toxic materials.
- Supporting material efficiency, conservation, and reuse.
- Supporting accurate assessment and communication of the burdens of pollution on health, which include life cycle assessments (LCAs) that look at the continuum of cradle-to-grave use.\(^1\)
- Supporting continued research on the health effects of emerging forms of pollution, which include greenhouse gases, pharmaceutical & personal care products, and hydraulic fracturing waste.
- Integrating pollution prevention into initiatives enhancing local public health system capacities to monitor, detect, and respond to public health threats.
- Supporting the implementation of Health in All Policies.\(^2\)
- Supporting improved environmental management systems for government agencies, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and communities.
- Supporting the creation and maintenance of an adequately-trained public health workforce to support pollution prevention and control.

Promoting LHD involvement in local, state, regional, and federal decision-making regarding pollution allowances, land-use planning, and other items impacting pollution prevention.

Justification
Pollution is the contamination of the air, water, or soil by substances harmful or potentially harmful to health.\(^3\) Air, water, and soil pollution present numerous and serious threats to health through inhalation, ingestion, and dermal absorption.\(^4\) Pollution prevention activities should be
health-based, science-based, and sustainable to protect public health from different sources of pollutants.

Air pollutants include, but are not limited to, carbon monoxide, ground level ozone, lead, mercury, nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, radiation, sulfur dioxide, volatile organic compounds, and the 187 Hazardous Air Pollutants. Health effects of air pollution are both acute and chronic and include lung damage, asthma, respiratory disease, brain and kidney damage, impaired fetal development, neurological disorders, cardiovascular disease, heart attack, cancer, and death.

Air pollution from greenhouse gases (e.g., carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆)) is causing global climate change, which endangers public health. Climate change is changing the distribution of some infectious disease vectors and threatens to “increase the number of people suffering from death, disease and injury from heatwaves, floods, storms, fires and droughts.” Climate change may also cause social disruption, economic decline, and displacement of populations, all of which may have substantial impacts on human health.

Water pollutants include, but are not limited to, “dredged spoil, solid waste, incinerator residue, sewage, garbage, sewage sludge, munitions, chemical wastes, biological materials, radioactive materials, heat, wrecked or discarded equipment, rock, sand, cellar dirt and industrial, municipal, and agricultural waste discharged into water.” An emerging area of concern is water pollution in the form of pharmaceuticals and personal care products, which may persist in the environment and impact human health directly through potable water and indirectly through uptake in aquatic ecosystems. Fracking for natural gas is another growing concern that produces waste in the form of surface water and ground water contamination from dissolved solids, metals, radioactive materials, and fracking fluid additives.

Soil can be polluted through a variety of sources, including through wastewater treatment, industry, and agriculture. Soil pollutants include arsenic, benzene, cyanide, lead, mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), toluene, trichloroethylene, and many others. Health effects from soil contaminants include nervous system effects, confusion, irritation of exposed skin and body, reproductive effects, and cancer.

The health burdens of pollution should not be disproportionately or inequitably based on socioeconomic status, race, or any other attribute of diversity. Pollution has especially negative health consequences for vulnerable populations that include children, the elderly, those with existing chronic diseases, and populations in areas with disproportionately high pollution levels. In supporting pollution prevention, the vulnerabilities of populations should be evaluated and addressed to ensure adequate protections against pollution in communities.

References
2. “HiAP seeks to highlight the connections and interactions between health and policies from other sectors. HiAP explores policy options that contribute to the goals of non-health sectors and will improve health outcomes.” SA Health. Health in All Policies webpage. Retrieved Oct. 10, 2011, from


U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Endangerment and Cause or Contribute Findings for Greenhouse Gases under Section 202(a) of the Clean Air Act, 40 C.F.R. §1 (2009).


Record of Action

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