

02-02

## 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.
- 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.<sup>1</sup>
- Supporting improved environmental management systems for government agencies, businesses, non-governmental organizations, and communities.
- Supporting the creation and maintenance an adequately-trained public health workforce.
- Promoting LHD involvement in local, state, regional, and federal decision-making regarding pollution allowances, land-use planning, and other items impacting pollution prevention.

Pollution prevention activities should be health-based, science-based, and sustainable. The health burdens of pollution should not be disproportionately or inequitably based on socio-economic status, race, or any other attribute of diversity.

### Justification

Pollution is the contamination of the air, water, or soil by substances harmful or potentially harmful to health. Air, water, and soil pollution present numerous and serious threats to health.

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,<sup>2</sup> and 187 Hazardous Air Pollutants.<sup>3</sup> Health effects of air pollution are both acute and chronic and include lung damage, asthma, respiratory disease, brain and kidney damage,<sup>4</sup> impaired fetal development, neurological disorders, cardiovascular disease, heart attack, cancer, and death.<sup>5</sup>



Greenhouse gas (e.g., carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), and sulfur hexafluoride (SF<sub>6</sub>)) air pollution is causing global climate change, which endangers public health.<sup>6</sup> Climate change is already 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.”<sup>7</sup> Climate change may also cause social disruption, economic decline, and displacement of populations, all of which may impact health substantially.<sup>8</sup>

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.”<sup>9</sup>

Soil pollutants include arsenic, benzene, cyanide, lead, mercury, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), toluene, trichloroethylene, and many others.<sup>10</sup>

Pollution has especially negative health consequences for particularly vulnerable populations including children, the elderly, those with existing chronic diseases, and populations in areas with disproportionately high pollution levels.

## **Record of Action**

*Adopted by the NACCHO Board of Directors, February 28, 2002*

*Updated November 2011*

## **References**

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