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In Historic Step, EPA Determines Global Warming Major Threat to Human Health, Environment
A Wake-Up Call for Action

(Washington – April 17, 2009). In an historic step, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lisa Jackson today formally determined that global warming pollution “endangers” the nation’s human health and well-being.

“The U.S. is taking its first steps as a nation to confront climate change,” said [Vickie Patton, deputy general counsel at Environmental Defense Fund](#). “Global warming threatens our health, our economy, and our children’s prosperity. EPA’s action is a wake up-call for national policy solutions that secure our economic and environmental future.”

Today’s landmark action is required by the U.S. Supreme Court, which rejected the Bush EPA’s “laundry list” of reasons not to address global warming pollution under the federal Clean Air Act in a landmark April 2, 2007, judicial decision.

Today’s decision – a determination that global warming pollution is a danger to America’s health and well-being – reflects the first step under the federal Clean Air Act to begin establishing national emission standards for large global warming emitters but does not contain such emission limits. It is anticipated that EPA will finalize the “endangerment” determination while it begins developing national emission standards for new motor vehicles and new coal-fired power plants, the nation’s two largest sources of global warming pollution.

EPA’s action comes as Congress takes its own historic steps toward enacting a cap on global warming pollution. The House Energy and Commerce Committee next week will begin hearings on comprehensive energy and climate legislation and move quickly to a vote on the bill, called the American Clean Energy and Security Act. Chairman Henry Waxman has committed to moving the bill out of committee by Memorial Day. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said she intends to bring the bill to the House floor this year.

Background

EPA Responds to an Order from the U.S. Supreme Court. In 2003, the Bush EPA denied a 1999 request to establish greenhouse gas emission standards for motor vehicles under the Clean Air Act. EPA claimed it had no power to address global warming pollution, expressly reversing prior EPA legal opinions. On April 2, 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Massachusetts v. EPA* pointedly admonished EPA for its refusal to act by proffering a “laundry list of reasons not to regulate” greenhouse gas emissions. The high Court commanded EPA to make a decision on the basis of science: “That EPA would prefer not to regulate greenhouse gases because of some residual uncertainty...is irrelevant. The statutory question is whether sufficient information exists to make an endangerment finding.”

The Science Shows Abrupt Climate Impacts and Threat to Poor, Elderly, Human Health. EPA’s extensive review of the science, conducted as part of today’s “endangerment” determination, documented: (1) abrupt climate change impacts including the accelerated flow and thinning at the edges of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets and associated effects on sea level rise; (2) the climate-related human health perils for the poor, the elderly, the disabled, and the uninsured, and (3) the expected climate-induced rise in smog pollution and heat-related deaths in major regions of the country.

Pollution Has Soared While EPA Denied Responsibility. EPA’s action is long overdue. Since citizens petitioned EPA to address global warming pollution in 1999, the nation has discharged nearly 70 billion tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and heat-trapping carbon dioxide concentrations have soared to 385 parts per million (2008).

Policy Solutions, Not Scare-Tactics. EPA’s announcement is a wake up call for national policy action that will reduce global warming pollution and grow America’s clean energy economy. But the usual suspects that lobby to delay progress and avoid accountability continue to use scare tactics to claim that action by EPA will result in a “cow tax” and make other absurd claims. EPA is not even requiring **reporting** of greenhouse gas emissions for sources emitting less than 25,000 tons of carbon dioxide annually. To put the 25,000 reporting threshold into perspective, it is the amount of pollution emitted from the annual energy use of about 2,200 homes, approximately 58,000 barrels of oil consumed, or 130 railcars of coal.

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