

## **The Clean Air Act and the EPA**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is under siege both ideologically and financially and we in the Four Corners area stand to lose as much as any region in the country from the proposed budget cuts. As Earth Day, April 22, approaches let's remind ourselves of how we here in La Plata County have benefited and will benefit in the future from an active and adequately funded EPA.

In the aftermath of the first Earth Day in 1970, Congress passed the Clean Air Act (CAA) and created the EPA to implement it. Over the 40 years since, the CAA has yielded dramatic public health and environmental benefits. CAA programs have achieved major reductions in dangerous air pollutants that cause smog, acid rain, and lead poisoning. The EPA reports that this has prevented hundreds of thousands of premature deaths, has helped millions avoid developing respiratory ailments and heart disease, and, by banning leaded gasoline, has greatly reduced the incidence of low child IQ.

The benefits of these advances have far exceeded the costs of compliance. An EPA analysis of the CAA's first 20 years found that the dollar value of the human health and environmental benefits amounted to more than 40 times the costs of regulation. For the 1990-2010 period, as requirements have become more stringent, the EPA estimates a benefit-to-cost ratio of four to one.

At the same time, CAA programs spurred significant growth in the U.S. environmental technologies industry. By 2007, the industry was generating \$282 billion in revenues, producing \$40 billion in exports, and supporting 1.6 million jobs. Innovations include catalytic converters, scrubbers, and low-VOC paints and consumer products.

The work continues as we hear about the EPA's Best Available Control Technology improvements proposed for our two closest coal-fired power plants, now going through the public comment process. The recent announcement of proposed federal standards for emissions of mercury (and arsenic, chromium, nickel and acid gases) would prevent 91 percent of mercury from coal-fired plants nationally from being released into the air, according to the EPA. All of this affects us directly as businesses, residents or visiting vacationers.

In April, 2007 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (GHG) met the definition of 'air pollutants' under the CAA and directed the EPA to determine whether or not GHG emissions cause or contribute to air pollution that endangers public health or welfare. In December 2009 the EPA issued its 'endangerment finding' that GHG concentrations in the atmosphere do threaten the public health and welfare of current and future generations. The agency then went to work on emission standards for different sectors of the economy beginning with light-duty motor vehicles and passenger cars. The EPA is also phasing in regulations for major (defined as emitting 75,000-100,000 tons/year) stationary sources of GHG emissions such as power plants, industrial facilities, and refineries. Taken together, power plants and refineries account for approximately 40% of all U.S. GHG emissions.

Opponents of the new rules are working to block or delay EPA regulation of GHG emissions. Several dozen legal challenges to EPA's recent actions have been filed by a variety of business and industry groups and by several states.

In Congress, bills have been introduced that would amend the CAA to limit the use of EPA funds, and exclude or delay regulation of GHGs.

The League of Women Voters strongly opposes these efforts to undermine the EPA's ability to establish urgently needed clean air protections required for by the CAA. As residents of the Four Corners area, we are seeing at close range both the impact of toxic pollution and climate change on our environment and the EPA's tangible efforts to limit the local contribution of greenhouse gases, mercury and nitrogen oxides to the atmosphere. It's time for action -- time to reduce global warming pollution and safeguard "the public health and welfare of current and future generations."

Please contact Senators Mark Udall and Michael Bennet as well as our Congressional Representative Scott Tipton and urge support for a fully functional EPA. Yes, it will take money to keep the agency functioning. However, in the past we haven't been paying the full economic cost of energy production. And you simply cannot put a price on the health of current and future Four Corners residents.

Marilyn Brown  
League of Women Voters of La Plata County  
March 30, 2011