For five decades, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has made and enforced protections that reined in polluters and saved lives. Now, the agency is working on public health standards that will clean up our air and water, and save even more lives: carbon pollution protections for new and existing power plants, dirty smog that pollutes our air, and toxic water pollution.

However, the new Congressional Leadership has declared that it will force legislation to block, weaken or delay these critical air and water pollution standards. The people of Minnesota did not vote to unravel the five decades of progress we’ve made tackling pollution and making our nation a cleaner, safer and healthier place to raise children. Members of Congress must stand up to this polluter payoff agenda and vote against any attempts to weaken clean air, clean water and public health protections for Minnesota.

Polluter-backed leaders in Congress have threatened to roll back progress on critical public health protections on issues like:

**CARBON POLLUTION**
Carbon pollution is the main contributor to climate disruption, making extreme weather worse — including more severe floods, widespread wildfires and record drought. It is also linked to life-threatening air pollution — such as the smog that can trigger asthma attacks. Coal and gas-fired power plants emit more than 2.3 billion metric tons per year of carbon pollution, approximately 40% of total U.S. energy-related carbon pollution.

The EPA’s first-ever proposed carbon pollution protections will limit the amount of carbon pollution that power plants can dump into our air. These safeguards will require energy companies to reduce their carbon pollution using technological innovation or to transition to cleaner sources of energy. EPA projects that these protections could save up to 6,600 lives, prevent over 150,000 asthma attacks, and create benefits of up to $93 billion per year between money saved in health care costs and jobs created in transitioning to clean energy. By establishing strong carbon pollution protections under the proposed Clean Power Plan, the EPA can clean up and modernize the way we power our country.

**SMOG POLLUTION**
Smog (also called ground-level ozone) is widespread air pollution that is known to cause respiratory problems, including asthma attacks. According to the American Lung Association (ALA), inhaling smog pollution is like getting a sunburn on your lungs and often results in immediate
breathing trouble. Long term exposure to smog pollution is linked to chronic asthma and other respiratory and lung diseases, reproductive and developmental harm, and even premature death. The ALA has determined that there are currently over 147.6 million people (47 percent of Americans) living in areas with levels of smog pollution that have been linked to these health problems.

Smog pollution is particularly harmful to several groups of people. Children, whose lungs are still developing, on average take deeper breaths and are more likely to spend long periods outdoors, placing them at higher risk. Studies have found older adults face a greater risk of respiratory and cardiovascular problems because, with age, all of our bodies become increasingly susceptible to the assault from dirty air. Additionally, evidence suggests low-income neighborhoods and communities of color face higher risk of Smog pollution as there are proportionately more power plants and industrial facilities located in or near these areas. Jobs that include outdoor labor, such as agricultural or construction work, put people at risk because of increased exposure.

The EPA is in the process of updating the outdated, Bush-era smog standard of 75 parts per billion (ppb), which doctors and scientists tell us is insufficient to protect public health, particularly for children, the elderly, and those with breathing ailments like asthma.

We urge the EPA to uphold science and listen to the recommendations of expert medical groups by setting a standard no higher than 60ppb. EPA’s own analysis shows that the strongest option under consideration would save taxpayers as much as $75.9 billion annually when fully implemented through lower health care costs. Each year, this would translate into as many as 7,900 lives saved, 1.8 million juvenile asthma attacks prevented, and 1.9 million missed school days avoided. A strong, science-based smog standard would protect public health and help millions of Americans breathe easier.

**COAL ASH**

Every year, the nation’s coal plants produce 140 million tons of coal ash pollution, the toxic by-product that is left over after the coal is burned, and dumped in the backyards of power plants across the nation into open pits. Coal ash pollution contains high levels of toxic heavy metals, such as arsenic, lead, selenium, and other cancer causing agents.
The public health hazards and environmental threats to nearby communities from unsafe coal ash dumping have been known for many years and include increased risk of cancer, learning disabilities, neurological disorders, birth defects, reproductive failure, asthma, and other illnesses. Living near a wet coal ash storage pond is significantly more dangerous than smoking a pack of cigarettes a day, according to a risk assessment done by the EPA. In fact, people living within 1 mile of unlined coal ash ponds can have a 1 in 50 risk of cancer—more than 2,000 times higher than what the EPA considers acceptable.

While they do not go far enough, this past December, the EPA proposed the first-ever protections for the disposal of coal ash. We need to make sure these standards are implemented.

THE PUBLIC SUPPORTS STRONG PUBLIC HEALTH PROTECTIONS

Strong majorities of Americans support health and environmental protections, and they expect their elected leaders to advance — not attack — policies that protect air and water quality and combat global climate disruption. According to a new poll, 81% of Americans believe climate disruption is caused at least in part by human activities. Another 74% of Americans said the federal government should be doing a “substantial amount” to combat it.1

Poll after poll shows that Americans strongly support the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Clean Power Plan. A 2014 poll found that 70% of U.S. voters favor limits on the amount of carbon pollution that power plants can release.2 This support has been validated by many subsequent surveys. Another recent poll found that 67% of adults nationwide support the Clean Power Plan, while just 29% oppose it.3 Additionally, most Americans support limiting carbon pollution from power plants even if it meant higher utility bills. Nearly two-in-three Americans (63%) said they would support the plan even if it increased their utility bill by 20 dollars each month. Majority support was found across party lines.4

Any attempts to weaken clean air, clean water and public health protections are simply out-of-step with what the public wants. An overwhelming majority (91%) of American voters support strengthening protections against pollution of drinking water and air.5 Specifically, the public welcomes strong limits on smog pollution from power plants. According to new polling from the American Lung Association, 68% of voters nationwide support the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency setting “stricter limits” on the amount of smog that power plans and other industrial facilities can release.6

CONGRESS SHOULD PROTECT PUBLIC HEALTH, NOT BIG POLLUTERS

Minnesota’s Members of Congress should represent the interests of their constituents, not Big Polluters, by voting against attacks on public health protections. We need the government to do what we cannot do individually — protect us from pollution and polluters who are only motivated by higher profits and their bottom line.

Stronger EPA protections to curb life-threatening pollution can help us improve the lives of Minnesotans and millions of Americans and clean up our air, water, and environment. We can make the world safer and healthier for our children and families.

**Minnesota At A Glance:**

- 438,900 people with Asthma
- 176,818 people with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
- 1.5 million tons of coal ash generated each year
- 34 coal ash ponds (7 unlined), 8 coal-ash landfills
- 25 million metric tons of Carbon Dioxide emissions emitted annually from fossil fuel-fired power plants
Please urge your Member of Congress to:

• Oppose any legislative attack that would block, weaken, or delay critical Clean Air and Clean Water standards or undermine EPA’s regulatory authority.

• Weigh in with the EPA supporting the strongest possible smog standard.

Minnesotans Took a Stand in 2014:

• 2,505 Sierra Club members in MN took action to support a stronger smog standard
• 1,351 Sierra Club members in MN took action to support the Clean Power Plan
• 1,363 Sierra Club members in MN took action to support stronger coal ash standards
• 776 Sierra Club members in MN took action to oppose the pro-polluter agenda in Congress

ENDNOTES

2 http://vault.sierraclub.org/pressroom/climatepoll/