MARYLAND’S AIR: STILL AT RISK

Maryland families suffer from some of the worst air quality on the Atlantic Coast. More than 85 percent of Marylanders live in areas that are classified as failing to meet the nation’s safe air standards. Baltimore in particular has the highest rates of both childhood and adult asthma in the state, surpassing national averages with more than a quarter of high school students having been diagnosed with asthma at some point.1

While air pollution can be harmful to everyone, it’s especially dangerous for children, seniors, and those already suffering from respiratory or heart disease. There are more than 1.1 million children, 645,000 seniors, and nearly half a million asthma sufferers in Maryland whose health is put at greater risk from air pollution.2 And communities of color in Maryland suffer from even higher rates of asthma and asthma-related hospitalizations and death.3 But despite the severity of the problem, our state elected leaders have blocked common-sense solutions, siding with a Big Polluter over Maryland families.

SO2 POLLUTION

Sulfur dioxide pollution (SO2) is linked to asthma attacks, severe respiratory problems, lung disease and heart complications. Inhaling sulfur dioxide makes it hard for people with asthma to breathe. High levels of SO2 force people to the emergency room and to hospitals because they have trouble breathing. The Baltimore area in particular is burdened with concentrations of sulfur dioxide pollution—coming primarily from the Crane and Wagner coal-fired power plants—that exceed the level that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says is safe. Unlike most of the Eastern coal fleet, neither plant has installed modern emission controls for SO2, and the Wagner plant just south of Baltimore City consistently records among the highest SO2 emission rates on the entire eastern seaboard.

DANGEROUS POLLUTION FROM MULTIPLE COAL FIRED POWER PLANTS THREATENS OUR LARGEST CITY AND SOME OF OUR MOST AT RISK POPULATIONS.
SMOG
Breathing smog is like getting sunburn on your lungs, and exposure to it is well understood to cause a wide range of adverse health effects. Smog is a potent asthma trigger, leading to hospital admissions and emergency department visits. This is a particularly acute concern in Baltimore where an alarming 20% of Baltimore City children under 18 have asthma—more than double the national average. And exposure to elevated levels of smog is linked to pre-term birth, heart attacks, and even premature mortality.

COAL PLANTS ARE A MAJOR CAUSE
Maryland’s coal plants are the largest individual emitters of smog-forming pollution and are also responsible for belching out a whopping 44 percent of all dangerous sulfur dioxide emissions in the state. Yet Maryland lags far behind other Eastern states in the use of modern pollution controls for these pollutants, with fewer than half of the coal units in the state employing the most effective technology. Poorly controlled plants can emit smog-causing pollution at rates 10 times higher than the best-controlled plants. Maryland currently ranks near the bottom of Eastern states in installation of these critical pollution controls, trailing even coal-heavy states like Alabama, Kentucky, Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

STATE LEADERS SIDING WITH BIG POLLUTERS
Last year the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) developed important new protections against smog-forming pollution from the state’s coal-fired power plants. Those safeguards would have helped all Marylanders breathe easier by requiring the state’s coal plants to consistently operate their existing pollution controls while also ensuring that all plants are equipped with modern pollution controls or switch to burning cleaner fuel by the end of the decade. These protections, which were required under the Clean Air Act to help Maryland’s air quality meet health-based standards established by the EPA, reflected a careful compromise that received unanimous backing from Maryland’s independent Air Quality Control Advisory Council, the public health community, and Raven Power, owner of half of the affected plants.

Nevertheless, after these critical protections were adopted and finalized by MDE, Governor Hogan pulled them back as one of his first acts in office. After stating that he will be “...the best environmental governor that’s ever served,” Governor Hogan has instead started his term by immediately siding with Big Polluter rather than Maryland families. Now we need Governor Hogan’s administration to choose our health over corporate polluters by re-instating the original protections.

YOU CAN HELP CLEAN UP OUR AIR
• Take action at sc.org/mdbeyondcoal
• Complete our volunteer survey at sc.org/mdvolunteer
• Write a letter to the editor of your local paper demanding that Governor Hogan clean up our air by limiting air pollution from coal plants

ENDNOTES
1 Baltimore City Health Department, Asthma in Baltimore: http://www.baltimorehealth.org/asthma.html