

Attacks on federal air pollution regulations dangerous to Americans' health

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Efforts by some in Congress to dismantle clean air laws are a threat to public health, experts warn in a "Current Issues" article published online today in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

"It is well accepted that [air pollution](#) has a deleterious impact on personal and public health," write authors Joshua Lipsman, MD, JD, MPH, Immediate Past Chairman, Environmental [Health Committee](#), American College of Preventive Medicine, and Arthur L. Frank, MD, PhD, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Environmental and Occupational Health at the Drexel University School of Public Health.

"Since control and reduction of air pollution are subject to federal regulation, physicians, as advocates for patients, must help educate the Congress on its critical role in preventing the health effects of air pollution," they say. "This is particularly important given that Congress is currently debating whether to dismantle existing laws that protect the air we breathe, especially the Clean Air Act (CAA), a cornerstone of environmental health law."

The Clean Air Act authorizes the federal government to reduce airborne contaminants, smog and air pollution in general. Responsibility for the CAA was given to the U.S. [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) after its establishment in 1970. Since its initial passage, a number of amendments to the law have been passed, all with strong bipartisan support, to keep pace with the growing evidence base directly linking air quality to health.

In 2007, the Supreme Court said the [Clean Air Act](#) could be used to fight global warming. In 2009, the EPA said that that [climate change](#) caused by pollution from industries, automobiles and other sources [burning fossil fuels](#) threaten public health and welfare. This statement made the EPA one of the central targets of the anti-regulatory agenda in Washington.

"Unfortunately, a faction in Congress is working to soften regulations on environmental polluters, which consequently will greatly weaken the health protective impacts of the CAA. Several bills have been introduced in the 112th Congress to delay or remove the authority of the EPA to regulate pollutants such as carbon dioxide and others, which researchers have found contribute to the greenhouse effect in the Earth's atmosphere," Dr. Lipsman said.

The authors call on concerned physicians to write, call or e-mail Congress and ask them to strengthen and not weaken existing air pollution laws. They also recommend work with advocacy groups in this effort. "Professional societies such as the American College of Preventive Medicine and the American Thoracic Society seek physicians to become involved in their advocacy efforts. For the sake of patients and the [health](#) of the American public, we urge Congress to preserve the authority of the EPA under the CAA."

More information: Lipsman J, Frank AL. Attack on Protections Against Air Pollution. *Am J Prev Med*. 2011 Dec; 41 (6).

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