



Public Health at Risk: The Consequences of Withdrawing the EPA Endangerment Finding

By a Pediatric Pulmonologist

Key Points:

- *“The 2009 determination by the EPA that emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases pose a danger to public health and welfare—the Endangerment Finding—serves as the legal foundation for the EPA to regulate these emissions.”*
- *“Air pollution has been associated with a broad spectrum of diseases impacting nearly every organ system, with cardiovascular and respiratory diseases constituting the majority of the health burden.”*
- *“Environmental regulations and economic growth can indeed coexist.”*
- *“Health care professionals need to unite in opposition to this deregulation, which poses an unwarranted risk to the health of all individuals, both healthy and vulnerable.”*

Public Health Progress and Environmental Protections

Since the beginning of the 20th century, American health has shown a steady improvement, initially driven by advancements in sanitation, the introduction of vaccines, and the discovery of antibiotics. Continuous advancements in public health have also been made through the adoption of policies to ensure the safety of food, water, and air quality. Consequently, the life expectancy of Americans at birth has grown by 30 years since 1900.^{1,2}

Climate Change and the Role of the EPA Endangerment Finding

The world is not a static place, and public health initiatives are continually adapting to meet the challenges posed by the ever-changing global environmental systems, swift industrial growth, and advancements in technology. One significant challenge that requires a public health response is the growing recognition that climate change poses a threat to public health. Greenhouse gas emissions are the primary catalyst of global climate change, which is exacerbating heat waves, droughts, hurricanes, and floods, while also contributing to the melting of glaciers and rising sea levels.

The 2009 determination by the EPA that emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases pose a danger to public health and welfare—the Endangerment Finding—serves as the legal foundation for the EPA to regulate these emissions. On February 12, the current administration revoked this finding. Should this revocation withstand the forthcoming legal challenges, it will result in the EPA effectively dismantling nearly all of its regulations concerning greenhouse gas emissions, particularly those from vehicles and trucks, as well as from power plants and other stationary sources. This recent action aims to extend even further by obstructing future administrations from reinstating any such regulations aimed at addressing climate change.

Health Risks of Increased Air Pollution

The discontinuation of the EPA's regulation on greenhouse gases would result in significantly elevated emissions of these gases within the United States compared to what would occur otherwise, thereby posing a threat to further global warming and the downstream multiplier effects. One immediate risk to public health in America will arise from an increase in air pollution.

Air pollution has been associated with a broad spectrum of diseases impacting nearly every organ system, with cardiovascular and respiratory diseases constituting the majority of the health burden. Furthermore, there is compelling evidence that air pollution correlates with a heightened risk of premature births, diminished cognitive function, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, depression, anxiety and autistic characteristics during childhood.³

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Economic Arguments and Public Health Reality

DATA INSIGHT

U.S. emissions of major air pollutants fell by more than 70% from 1970 to 2020—while the economy and population grew.

The main rationale behind this repeal is motivated by the economic objective of eradicating what it refers to as "regulatory overreach" and alleviating the cost of living for Americans. The administration contended that expensive regulations obstructed economic advancement.

This is remarkably reckless and a deliberate disregard to the fact that the economy, public health, and environmental quality are fundamentally interconnected. Evidence shows that reducing air pollution has been cost-effective in terms of healthcare savings in the USA, Asia, and Europe.⁴⁻⁵

From 1970 to 2020, despite the growth of the economy and population, emissions of significant air pollutants fell by more than 75%, demonstrating that environmental regulations and economic growth can indeed coexist.⁶ Conversely, permitting an increase in greenhouse gas emissions poses a risk of exacerbating global warming and the subsequent threat multipliers, which include jeopardizing American public health due to heightened air pollution.

Regional Impact: Air Quality in Ohio

This is especially relevant to the residents of Ohio. According to the American Lung Association's "State of the Air" report for 2025, which serves as an annual assessment of air quality across the United States, the metropolitan areas of Cleveland, Akron, Canton, and Cincinnati were ranked as the ninth and fourteenth most polluted regions for annual particle pollution among 208 metropolitan areas.⁷

Public Expectations for Environmental Safety

Most Americans care deeply about healthy air, food and water. Annually, we invest billions of dollars in bottled water, largely due to its perceived health advantages. However, with a few exceptions, the water supply in the United States is generally clean and safe.

Any attempts to lessen regulations on clean water or food, based on the dubious promise of lowering economic costs, would be met with strong opposition. The public would reject any reduction in regulations that could potentially result in contaminated food or water; therefore, it raises the question of why we should accept similar reductions in air quality regulations, which equally impact our health.

A Call to Action for Health Care Professionals

Health care professionals need to unite in opposition to this deregulation, which poses an unwarranted risk to the health of all individuals, both healthy and vulnerable. Initiatives aimed at enhancing air quality represent prudent and vital investments for the physical and economic well-being of all.

The consistent indifference shown by the current administration towards sustainability further emphasizes the need for individuals to contemplate how we can change our lifestyles and work habits to minimize our carbon footprint.

And bottled air is currently not an alternative.

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From the Academy of Medicine of Cincinnati

Following the submission of this article, the Academy of Medicine of Cincinnati engaged with congressional offices representing our district to share physician perspectives on the health implications of environmental policy.

Physician leadership on environmental health has long been part of Cincinnati's history. More than a century ago, Academy physicians helped establish Cincinnati's Smoke Abatement League—one of the nation's earliest organized efforts to address the health impacts of industrial air pollution.

Physicians who wish to share their perspective on environmental health policy are encouraged to contact Ohio's U.S. Senators using the template message below.

PHYSICIAN ACTION

Share your perspective with Ohio's U.S. Senators in **2 simple clicks**.

A template message is provided and can be personalized with your own clinical experience.

[Contact Senator Jon Husted](#)

[Contact Senator Bernie Moreno](#)

[Message Template](#)

References

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