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Harvard study links soot to diabetes

Latest study in a long line of research linking air pollution to harmful health impacts.

Columbus, OH – November is national diabetes month. Harvard researchers compared 2004 and 2005 EPA particulate matter 2.5 levels to the Center for Disease Control diabetes prevalence in U.S. counties. They revealed that diabetes prevalence increases with increasing PM_{2.5} concentrations, with a 1% increase in diabetes prevalence. Particulate matter 2.5 is about one-thirtieth the width of a human hair.

The study found that counties with higher levels of particulate matter pollution had increased prevalence of diabetes, even if the county was meeting federal air quality standards. Hundreds of medical studies have linked exposure to PM 2.5 to lung and heart disease, cancer, and preventable death. This is the first nationwide study to quantitatively link diabetes to PM exposure in the U.S.

“This study continues to raise the alarm bells.” States David R. Celebrezze, director of air and water special projects at the Ohio Environmental Council. “We know that in 2009, nonroad equipment (primarily diesel engines) were responsible for emitting about 477.95 tons of particulate matter 2.5 in Franklin County.”

The Clean Air Task Force also commented on the release of this study.

“Now we can add adult diabetes to the list of diseases linked to the dangerous particulate matter emitted from dirty diesel engines,” said Brooke Suter, National Diesel Clean-Up Campaign Director, Clean Air Task Force. “Our studies have already shown that diesel pollution shortens the lives of 21,000 people per year due to respiratory and cardiovascular disease, including about 3,000 from lung cancer. In addition, diesel contributes to an estimated 27,000 heart attacks annually, and is responsible for approximately 400,000 asthma attacks a year.”

Diabetes in the U.S. has doubled in the past 15 years to 24 million Americans. Commuters, people living in urban neighborhoods along busy roads, people in the diesel construction industry and rail, bus and trucking centers are among the most exposed to the diesel PM 2.5.

Solutions exist to diesel pollution. Retrofitting a diesel engine with a filter can reduce PM 2.5 pollution levels by at least 85%. Steps elected officials can take to severely reduce Ohio’s diesel emissions include:

- Help extend the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA), now under consideration by Congress;
- Support Clean Construction in the upcoming Federal Transportation Bill and in local construction projects. A clean construction requirement will ensure that construction equipment used on federally-funded transportation construction projects utilizes modern pollution controls;
- develop state-level clean construction requirements for its public works projects;
- Fund the state diesel cleanup grant program-Diesel Emission Reduction Grant to \$20 million for four years;
- Apply for funding for diesel retrofits for their local government and school system fleets, and establish anti-idling policies and ordinances at the local level;
- Adopt local no-idling ordinances for all vehicles.

The study can be found here: <http://care.diabetesjournals.org/content/33/10/2196>

For diesel impacts in your city or county visit the Clean Air Task Force:

<http://catf.us/diesel/dieselhealth/>

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The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is Ohio's leading advocate for fresh air, clean water, and sustainable land use. The OEC has a 40-year history of innovation, pragmatism, and success. Using legislative initiatives, legal action, scientific principles, and statewide partnerships, the OEC secures a healthier environment for Ohio's families and communities. For more information, visit www.theOEC.org.