



# BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

## **Testimony before the Environmental Protection Agency on Its Proposed Strengthening of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard for Ozone**

Submitted by Jamie Konopacky  
Representative for Sustainable Development

March 2015

I am pleased to join other religious representatives who are supporting the strengthening of the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for Ozone. In addition to scientific, technical, and economic components, reduction of ozone pollution has a deep moral dimension. The injustice and inequity of ozone pollution is a common concern for diverse faith groups.

If implemented, a 60 parts per billion (ppb) NAAQS for ozone promises to promote health, protect vulnerable populations, and foster justice and equity:

### Improving Health

According to the American Lung Association, ground-level ozone pollution increases the risk of premature death and causes breathing problems including: shortness of breath, asthma attacks, increased risk of respiratory infections, increased susceptibility to pulmonary inflammation, and increased hospitalization for health complications related to lung disease. In addition, ground-level ozone exposure may worsen allergies, increase the risk of heart attack, and cause decreased birth weight and lung function in newborns. According to the Association, “if EPA adopts an ozone standard of 60 ppb, it would prevent 1.8 million asthma attacks and prevent 7,900 premature deaths each year beginning in 2025.”

### Protecting Vulnerable Populations

According to the American Lung Association, children and teens, individuals over age 65, and persons with lung or cardiovascular diseases are particularly vulnerable to ozone pollution. The EPA’s Children’s Health Protection Advisory Committee recommends a revised ambient air quality standard of 60 ppb to protect the health of children. EPA’s own risk assessment report shows that a revised standard level of 60 ppb would reduce children’s exposures of concern by 95 to 100% compared to the current standard. In contrast, a standard of 70 ppb would reduce exposures of concern by only 15-35 percent, and a standard of 65 ppb would reduce the occurrence of such exposures by just 30 to 65 percent.

## Promoting Justice and Equity

According to the American Lung Association, because they often live closer to pollution sources and may be more likely to have diseases that put them at risk, low income individuals may also face higher risk from ozone. Recent findings by the Harvard School of Public Health strongly suggest that women, especially women of advanced age, may also be more vulnerable to ozone pollution.

---

Bahá'ís are guided by a firm belief in the principle of the oneness of humankind, which has profound implications for policy. Bahá'ís believe that just and equitable policies are central to establishing unity among humankind. Within the environmental context, just and equitable policies should aim to promptly and effectively reduce pollution burdens that have been unfairly shifted onto minorities, the poor, women, and the environment. Enacting a 60 ppb NAAQS for ozone is one way of honoring our commitment to these fundamental moral principles.

Millions of Americans already suffer from the harmful effects of ground-level ozone pollution. And, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists, warming temperatures from climate change will further exacerbate the health impacts and associated economic costs of ground-level ozone pollution. According to the organization, “[In the U.S.], [h]igher ground-level ozone concentrations due to rising temperatures in 2020 could lead to an average of 2.8 million more occurrences of acute respiratory symptoms such as asthma attacks, shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing, and chest tightness. In 2050, that could rise to an average of 11.8 million additional occurrences.” “Higher ozone concentrations due to rising temperatures could lead to an average of 3,700 more seniors and 1,400 more infants hospitalized for respiratory-related problems in 2020. In 2050, that could rise to 24,000 more seniors and 5,700 more infants hospitalized.”

Science shows that the current NAAQS for ozone results in the imposition of unjust and unequal health impacts on the poor, children, and the elderly. It also strongly suggests that ozone pollution unfairly impacts minorities and women. And, science informs us that this injustice and inequity is likely to increase with rising temperatures due to climate change. Justice and equity require lowering the NAAQS to 60ppb to ensure equal protection for all segments of society – especially our most vulnerable populations. I thank the EPA for its efforts to enact a revised NAAQS for ozone that is just and equitable.