



STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH *All of God's Creation*

Social Justice Committee, Holy Cross Parish, Mt. Airy, March 17, 2024

New Standards for Soot

On February 7th, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released its long-awaited **National Ambient Air Quality Standards for particulate matter (PM2.5)** -- commonly known as soot -- which is produced by burning fossil fuels and is connected to a wide range of health problems. "This is an important issue that often disproportionately affects the health of low-wealth communities living close to industrial facilities." (*Franciscan Action Network*, 2/13/24)

"The new rule will lower the annual standard from 12 mcg/m³ to 9 mcg/m³. Soot pollution is shown to increase the risk of asthma, heart attacks, stroke, cancer, and premature death, and nationally, this **new standard is expected to prevent up to 4,500 premature deaths, [800,000 asthma cases a year], 290,000 lost workdays per year, and result in as much as \$43 billion in net health benefits in 2032.**

The EPA will now determine areas of the country that do not meet the new 9 mcg/m³ standards and will release those results within two years. **States that do not meet the new standards will have 18 months to develop and submit plans to comply.**" (Cindy Carr, *Sierra Club*, 2/9/24)

"This is "the EPA's first update to air quality standards in a decade and is an important step for public health and environmental justice, Catholic leaders told National Catholic Reporter (NCR).... U.S. Bishops are urged to decarbonize their dioceses....

Daniel R. DiLeo, a Catholic Climate Covenant consultant and Associate Professor at Creighton University, ... encourages lay Catholics to organize, meet with their bishops, and advocate for them to take the step. 'Bishops are the preeminent stewards of the church's evangelical mission, which requires ecclesial social justice that embodies Catholic social teaching,' DiLeo writes." (*Catholic Climate Covenant*, 3/5/24)

What's the Data for Philadelphia?

Transportation

"According to an analysis from Clean Air Task Force, **diesel pollution in Philadelphia County results in an estimated 56 premature deaths per year**, and diesel pollution from trucks and buses **contributes 49 tons per year of soot within the county**.... Bringing down soot levels from diesel pollution could help Pennsylvania comply with federal standards.... [Through the bipartisan Infrastructure Act, the School District of Philadelphia has received a grant of nearly \$8 million from the EPA to double its electric bus fleet from 20 to 40 by 2027.]

Coal plants

Every year, pollution from coal plants causes an estimated 22 premature deaths in Philadelphia County." (Cindy Carr, *Sierra Club*, 2/9/24)

"Simply put, if you work outdoors or have a child with asthma or an elderly family member with a cardiopulmonary disease, this new standard will make it easier to breathe." (Ben Jealous, *Sierra*, 2/17/24)

Comments on this column may be directed to the Social Justice Committee at socialjustice@holycrossphl.org.