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ADEQ Proposes Weakening Air Quality Program

Late in the afternoon on Thursday, November 10, 2011, at the start of the Veterans Day holiday week-end, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ), acting in response to an executive order from the governor, put forth a Notice of Final Rulemaking to the Governor's Regulatory Review Council (GRRC) to repeal Arizona's Clean Cars Program. The GRRC is scheduled to make a decision in January 2012 after a final public hearing.

If the repeal is successful, Arizona will fall back to the weaker federal emissions standards and will miss an opportunity to further improve air quality and the state's economy. By 2020, under the federal plan, there would be an increase of ozone precursors of 3 metric tons a day of volatile organic compounds and 4.5 tons a day of oxides of nitrogen, both of which react with sunlight to form ozone. Ozone exposure inflames the respiratory system and is especially harmful to children and people with lung disease.

Sandy Bahr, Chapter Director for the Grand Canyon Chapter of the Sierra Club, called this the another step backwards for Arizona on clean air, "Considering the significant air quality issues in the Phoenix-area and in counties throughout the state, this is an irresponsible action by the governor and the prime agency responsible for improving air quality in Arizona."

In the most recent American Lung Association of Arizona's [*State of the Air*](#) report, Gila, Maricopa, Pinal, and Yuma Counties all received an "F" for ozone pollution. "Any cost savings Arizona plans to recover from a repeal of the Clean Car Program could be negated by increased health care costs," stated Stacey Mortenson, Executive Director of the ALA of Arizona. "Increased air pollution could result in more emergency room visits, hospital admissions and in some cases, the incidence of premature death for people who suffer from lung disease."

Jennifer Bonnett, Executive Director for the Arizona Public Health Association, agreed. "Even small improvements in air quality make a difference to those who suffer from asthma or other respiratory illness," Bonnett stated.

Rev. Doug Bland, Arizona Interfaith Power & Light, affirmed the need for the robust Clean Car standards. "Arizona's poor, our children, the ill and the elderly suffer most when air quality is poor."

According to the groups, not only does Arizona's Clean Cars Program benefit air quality and public health, but the Program also has a positive impact on the Arizona's economy. Bob Yuhnke, transportation director for the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project, said, "If Arizona's Clean Cars Program is repealed, new car buyers will lose thousands in fuel cost savings over the

life of a vehicle, and the state will abandon the opportunity to retain in the State's economy billions of dollars that would be unnecessarily spent on imported petroleum fuels.”

Diane E. Brown, Executive Director of the Arizona PIRG Education Fund, noted the inconsistency of state policy. “On the same day ADEQ put forth its final recommendation to repeal Arizona's Clean Cars Program thereby increasing emissions; ADEQ Director Darwin was announced as part of the steering committee for [North America 2050](#), an entity charged with reducing emissions.” A Partnership for Progress (NA2050) facilitates state and provincial efforts to design, promote and implement cost-effective policies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and create economic opportunities.

The [Clean Cars Program](#) limits health-damaging pollution from automobiles by establishing fleet-wide limits on tailpipe emissions and by requiring the sale of advanced-technology vehicles such as hybrids that have even lower emissions. Cleaner cars not only reduce air pollution and decrease adverse public health impacts such as asthma attacks, but they save consumers money at the pump, which advocates contend is particularly important as gas prices continue to fluctuate.