

On Friday, July 31, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Rules Committee Chair Louise Slaughter (D-NY) reintroduced the Coordinated Environmental Public Health Network Act. This legislation would establish a national public health tracking network to allow for the detection and identification of possible connections between adverse health effects and environmental hazards. It would also increase funding for biomonitoring work at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which tracks exposure levels to common chemicals.

“Exposure to harmful substances is an especially important issue in minority and low-income communities because factories and dumping sites that emit harmful pollutants are often located near communities with less political and economic power,” said Rep. Slaughter. “This legislation will help us effectively address environmental justice issues that lead to health hazards.”

“Approximately 7 out of 10 deaths in the United States are linked to chronic disease. Exposure to air pollution and harmful chemicals has been linked to many of these illnesses, including asthma, cancer and neurological disorders,” said Speaker Pelosi. “In California, for example, more than 33 million people live in areas where high levels of air pollution pose health risks, and breast cancer rates in San Francisco are among the highest in the country.

Many chronic diseases are on the rise. Asthma, for example, increased 76 percent nationwide between 1984 and 2003. Identifying pollutants that cause diseases and reducing harmful exposures will save lives and save our health care system billions of dollars each year. What’s more, it is our responsibility to do all we can to provide our children and future generations with the knowledge and tools they need to protect them from these ailments.

Background Information

Once fully operational, the network will coordinate national, state and local efforts to inform communities, public health officials, researchers and policymakers of potential environmental health risks, and to integrate this information with other parts of the public health system.

Over the past six years, Congress has allocated over \$180 million for pilot programs to begin developing the capacity for a Coordinated Environmental Public Health Network. The CDC has used these funds to implement pilot grants focused on building state and local capacity to track environmental exposures and adverse health outcomes. These projects have included efforts

to identify environmental health problems and to link, through standardization of electronic data elements, disparate sets of existing health data with data on environmental hazards. Funds have also gone toward research on the impact of environmental exposures on human health, as well as dissemination of best practices to additional jurisdictions interested in environmental health tracking. These pilot projects are giving the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Environmental Protection Agency the information they need to put in place the comprehensive, coordinated network created by this legislation.

This legislation is supported by numerous health and environmental groups, including Trust for America's Health, the Breast Cancer Fund, American Public Health Association, the Association of Public Health Laboratories and National Association for Public Health Statistics and Information Systems.

Links

- [H.R. 3426 at THOMAS](#)