



MEMORANDUM

TO: Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee (MWAQC)
FROM: Julie Kimmel, Air and Climate Public Advisory Committee (ACPAC) Chair
CC: ACPAC Members
SUBJECT: Recommendations on Regional Action to Address Air Quality Risks Linked to Climate Change
DATE: May 20, 2024

As the 18 members of ACPAC, representing a diversity of communities and professions in DC, Maryland, and Virginia, we want to communicate in the strongest terms our concern about the planetary emergency that is climate change. The world has been seeing ever-increasing temperatures in the atmosphere and in the oceans, with worsening impacts on natural ecosystems and human societies and disproportionate harm to low-income and marginalized communities. Here in the metropolitan Washington region, we have been burdened with more frequent and extreme flash flooding, drought, and heat waves; and last year, many of us were stunned to experience Code Red air pollution events resulting from record-shattering wildfires across Canada. The global average temperature increase is now uncomfortably close to the 1.5°C threshold acknowledged in the Paris Climate Agreement that separates us from potentially catastrophic impacts. (Please see the three attachments.)

We acknowledge the important air emissions reductions and resulting air quality improvements that MWAQC has presided over in recent years. At the same time, we believe that nascent, climate-driven, external factors like wildfire smoke and more frequent and intense episodes of hot, humid, and stagnant atmospheric conditions may increasingly reverse air quality gains. The metropolitan Washington region is currently allowed to exclude exceptional events like the 2023 wildfires from air quality monitoring data and thus avoid responsibility for any non-attainment of air quality standards brought about by such events. Furthermore, climate change may exacerbate the unhealthful and unjust impacts of air pollution on over-burdened communities in our region.

ACPAC has sent a parallel memo to CEEPC with climate-specific recommendations. The following are our key recommendations to MWAQC on air quality action:

1. MWAQC should **account for potential impacts of climate change**, including increases in smog-promoting heat waves and exceptional air pollution sources such as wildfires, in its air quality planning and then lead the region's local governments in **reducing pollutant emissions sufficiently to offset the impacts** of those external factors.
2. MWAQC should **work harder to alleviate air pollution hotspots** that harm the health of environmental justice communities. In support of this, MWAQC should do more to **monitor air pollution in these communities**, and **provide more effective alerts and early warning** for them.

3. Any new urban or industrial development will make it even more challenging to meet our region's clean energy demand and air quality standards (as well as our GHG emission reduction targets). Thus, **regional land-use planning and permitting need to consider and firmly address the impacts** of proposed projects on our ability to achieve climate, air quality, and justice and equity goals.
4. MWAQC needs to **continuously track the impacts of wildfires and other external factors on regional air quality**, and make adjustments in its work as necessary in order to better protect public health.

Thank you for hearing our concerns and considering our recommendations. We look forward to hearing back on next steps and would be glad to provide further input.

Attachments (3)