

Jackson Announces EPA Schools Monitoring Initiative

Release date: 03/02/2009

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Administrator Jackson: 'Our job is to protect the American public where they live, work and play – and that certainly includes protecting schoolchildren where they learn.'

(Washington, D.C. – March 2, 2009) Lisa Jackson, administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, announced today a new initiative to further measure levels of toxic air pollution near many schools across the country for better protection. EPA and its state partners will prioritize and monitor schools for more extensive air quality analysis, looking closely at schools located near large industries and in urban areas.

"I'm a mother first, and like all parents, I want to be sure my children are breathing healthy air at school," said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. "Questions have been raised about air quality around some U.S. schools, and those questions merit investigation. EPA will work quickly to make assessments and take swift action where necessary. Our job is to protect the American public where they live, work and play – and that certainly includes protecting schoolchildren where they learn."

Administrator Jackson has outlined an aggressive timeline for prioritizing and monitoring schools to determine any which are exposed to high levels of toxic air pollution. EPA anticipates monitoring at some schools will begin within the next 30 days. Directed by EPA, the monitoring will be conducted primarily by state and local governments. Some states have already begun monitoring.

Recent media reports have raised critical questions about air quality outside schools near large industrial facilities. At Administrator Jackson's confirmation hearings, she was asked about this issue by Congress and pledged to take swift action to investigate and remediate if necessary any potential high-risk exposure for our nation's school children.

EPA will work with states, tribes, and local communities to ensure that monitors are deployed quickly to get high-quality data and to share results with American families. This partnership will help EPA maximize its monitoring and analytical capabilities to develop a clearer picture of any potential risks to children from toxic air pollution. This action is particularly critical in some low-income areas, which are sometimes disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation.

From 1990 to 2005, emissions of air toxics in the United States declined 41 percent. Levels of air toxics, however, can vary widely from place to place depending upon a number of factors including the amount and types of industry nearby, proximity to heavily traveled or congested roadways, and weather patterns.

More information: <http://www.epa.gov/air/toxicair/newtoxics.html>