THE CLEAN AIR ACT – Highlights of the 1990 Amendments

On November 15, 1990 the Clean Air Act was revised with overwhelming bipartisan support and signed into law by President George H. W. Bush. Specifically the amendments were designed to curb four major threats to the environment and to the health of millions of Americans: acid rain, urban air pollution, toxic air emissions, and stratospheric ozone depletion. The amendments also established a national operating permits program to make the law more workable, and strengthened enforcement to help ensure better compliance with the Act.

Although important air pollution challenges remain, and we have much work left to do, the 1990 Amendments have had impressive results.

Air quality

- Air quality has improved significantly in our nation's cities and towns, reducing health threats such as lung damage, asthma, heart attacks and premature death. All of the 41 areas that had unhealthy levels of carbon monoxide pollution in 1991 now have levels that meet the health-based national air quality standard. More than 90 percent of areas originally identified as not meeting the 1997 ozone air quality standards now meet those standards. Since 1990, particle pollution levels have improved by 36 percent,
- One important reason for these improvements is flexible performance standards for new vehicles that are met by a combination of cleaner fuels and vehicle technologies. Under the 1990 amendments, new cars, SUVs and pickup trucks, heavy-duty trucks and buses have become dramatically cleaner. The same is true of non-road engines such as those used in industrial, farm and recreational equipment, locomotives, and marine vessels.
- In tandem with national requirements, states have adopted clean air plans to control emissions from the particular sources that contribute to unhealthy air pollution levels in our cities and towns. In addition, state and EPA programs to cut interstate air pollution have reduced pollution regionally and have helped most downwind areas to meet the 1997 and 2006 air quality standards for ozone and fine particles.

Acid rain and regional haze

- The Act also has dramatically reduced acid rain since 1990. An innovative market-based system of marketable pollution allowances has dramatically cut sulfur dioxide emissions, reducing acid rain as well as fine particle pollution that contributes to premature death. This federal program also has significantly reduced damage to water quality in lakes and streams, and improved the health of ecosystems and forests.
- In addition, the scenic vistas in our national parks are clearer due to reductions in pollution-caused haze. Further improvements are expected through implementation of state plans to reduce regional haze.

Toxic air pollution

- Under the 1990 amendments, industrial and other stationary sources emit about 1.5 million tons less toxic air pollution per year than in 1990. These standards set a level playing field by requiring higher emitting sources to achieve the cleaner level of performance achieved by the best performing similar sources.
- The 2012 Mercury and Air Toxics Standards are cutting toxic emissions from power plants, which had been the last unaddressed major sources of toxic air emissions. Toxic emissions from vehicles

and engines are dropping as well.

Ozone layer protection

- To protect the ozone layer, the U.S. has phased out the ozone depleting substances that Congress identified as "most damaging," including CFCs and halons, while promoting cost-effective alternatives. The phase-out of implemented 4-6 years faster, included 13 more chemicals, and cost 30 percent less than was predicted at the time the 1990 Amendments were enacted. Actions to protect the ozone layer are saving millions of people from fatal skins cancers and eye cataracts over periods of several decades.

Better air quality, better health protection, better economy

- The health benefits of the 1990 Amendments far outweigh the costs.

- A peer-reviewed EPA study issued in March 2011 found that the 1990 Amendments are achieving large health benefits that will grow further over time as programs take full effect. For example, the study estimates that in 2020, the Clean Air Act Amendments will avoid more than 230,000 early deaths, as well as large numbers of other adverse health effects, through improvements in fine particle and ozone levels.

- The economic value of the air quality improvements is estimated to reach almost $2 trillion for the year 2020, a value which vastly exceeds the costs of efforts to comply with the 1990 Clean Air Act and related programs.

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