

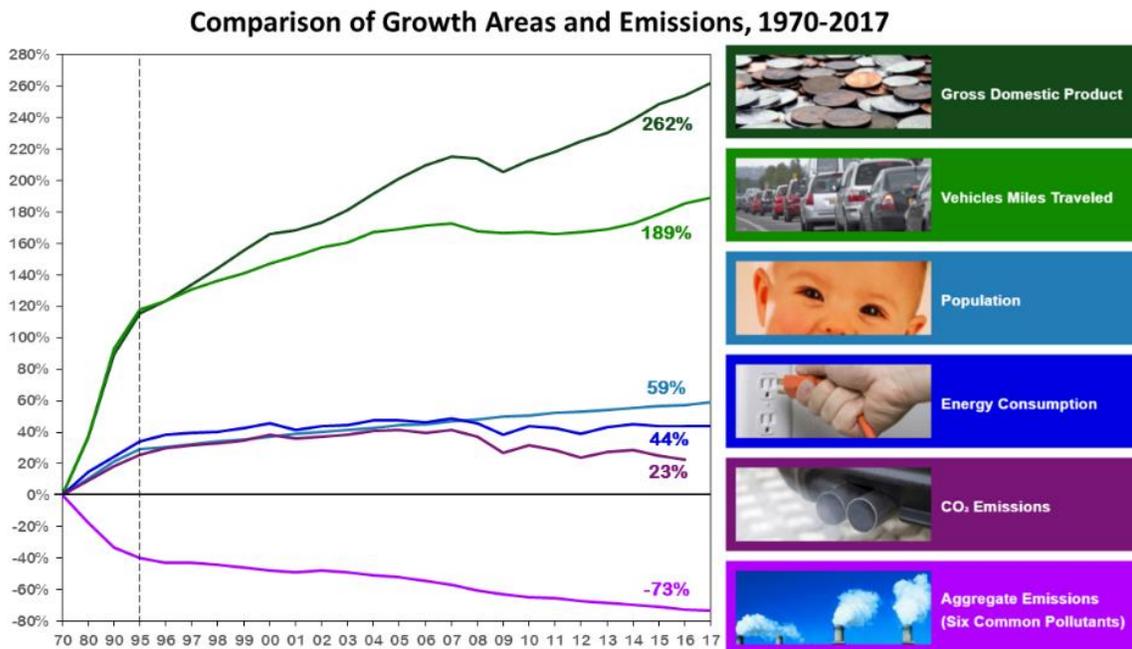
Air Pollution Health Standards

National Ambient Air Quality Standards must protect health.

The Clean Air Act requires EPA to set health-based limits, called National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), for six dangerous outdoor air pollutants: ozone, particulate matter, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and lead.

Protecting public health - with an adequate margin of safety - is the sole criterion that EPA can consider when setting an air quality standard, as affirmed by a unanimous Supreme Court decision in 2001. Congress intentionally decided that other factors, including cost, would best be addressed in determining steps to reduce pollution to meet the standard after it's been set.

Using this process, the Clean Air Act has saved lives and improved health while growing the economy, as the chart below shows.



Since 1970, these standards have driven a 73% reduction in the nation's most widespread air pollutants even while the economy grew by more than 150%. (Source: EPA).

To ensure the continued success of the Clean Air Act in protecting public health from air pollution, the National Ambient Air Quality Standards must continue to be based solely on health science and must be fully implemented and enforced. Current EPA actions threaten this progress.

Reviewing Standards: EPA must review the science every five years, and if necessary, update the National Ambient Air Quality Standards to protect public health.

- When Congress wrote the Clean Air Act, they recognized that the science on the health impacts of air pollution would continue to grow. Thus, the law requires EPA to review the science every five years and update the air pollution standards, if they're found inadequate to protect public health based on the current science.
- EPA is currently reviewing both the ozone and particle pollution standards, but has taken steps that will undercut those reviews.
 - The reviews will be rushed and inadequate. EPA started late and plans to finish in two years. The process usually involves reviewing hundreds of studies, exposure analyses and policy implications, plus holding public hearings and taking comments. To meet their deadline, EPA will cut short reviews and eliminate key steps.
 - EPA has eliminated two expert panels whose job was to review the research on these pollutants and advise EPA's Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee about their findings. This means that seven-member committee must read thousands of pages of research and analysis without the help of the panels of 20+ outside experts in the research and technical issues – all in a much shorter timeframe.

Enforcement: EPA must enforce air quality standards by identifying which areas have too much pollution and working with the states to develop a plan that results in real cleanup.

- The Clean Air Act requires that once EPA adopts standards based on the health science, it must work with states to identify which areas do not meet the standard and require cleanup. This process has driven the reduction in these pollutants since 1970.
- EPA is currently working with states with areas that fail to meet the most recent, 2015 ozone standards. Under the Clean Air Act, these states must develop an enforceable, effective cleanup plan that will enable them to meet the standards. However, EPA is taking steps to make it easier to exempt polluted areas from cleanup requirements.
- Unfortunately, EPA is also proposing to weaken its nearly 40-year-old policy about what constitutes “ambient air.” This would allow polluting sources a bigger surrounding area that does not have to meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. This change could affect millions of Americans who live in areas that experience these pollutants emitted directly from the factories, power plants and other facilities next door.
- EPA is also considering easing requirements for coal-fired power plants to get permits to increase emissions of pollutants, especially sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides. That Clean Air Act requirement, called New Source Review, would be drastically weakened for power plants as part of the EPA's Affordable Clean Energy proposal.

For more information

American Lung Association's Washington Office – 202-785-3355; HealthyAir@Lung.org

February 6, 2019