

Guest: Adopting clean-fuels standard is a public-health imperative

Air pollution adds to health care costs, causes lost days at work and school and is impacting climate change. Washington can do better by adopting a clean-fuels standard.



By [Howard Frumkin](#), [Renee Klein](#) and [Craig Kenworthy](#)

EACH and every day, we take an average of 21,000 breaths. For some of us, those breaths come and go without a thought. For those with asthma or other lung diseases, each breath can be a struggle.

In our state, more than a half million adults and 105,000 youths have asthma. Dirty air can trigger severe asthma attacks and presents a host of other lung, heart and cancer health risks. Prolonged exposure can even lead to early death.

We must all work harder to protect communities from unhealthy airborne toxins, and preserve our environment. That is why we strongly support accelerating Washington's transition toward a cleaner fuel supply. A clean-fuels standard would require oil refineries and distributors to reduce the carbon pollution from Washington's fuel by 10 percent over 10 years.

Companies can utilize an array of clean fuels and technology solutions to meet the standard, including advanced biofuels, electricity, natural gas, propane or even cleaning up existing petroleum-based gasoline or diesel.

A clean-fuels standard would protect health in two ways. First, it would reduce carbon pollution. Second, it would reduce other air pollutants, such as particulates.

Carbon pollution is the major contributor to climate change. Climate change, in turn, increases such health risks as heat waves, infectious diseases and severe storms. In fact, climate change even worsens air pollution, by promoting smog formation. Smog reduces children's lung function, and triggers more asthma attacks and other health problems.

But carbon pollution isn't the only problem. Gasoline and diesel combustion is also responsible for most of our state's other air pollutants — particulate matter, ozone, nitrogen oxides. These aggravate heart disease, lung disease and other health problems. The result? Higher health-care costs, and more lost days at work and school.

Those who live, work or attend school near major roadways — often communities of color and low-income families — are at greatest risk. Children, older adults and people living with lung and heart disease are especially vulnerable.

Fortunately, a solution is available. Thanks to technological advances, it's now possible to produce affordable, cleaner fuels capable of meeting our transportation needs without taking such a tremendous toll on human health.

Petroleum companies say we can't afford this kind of policy. Naturally, they would prefer to preserve their dominant market share. We say we can't afford not to provide a wider range of cleaner choices. We know it can work: Successful cleaner, low-carbon fuel standards are already in place in California and British Columbia.

A clean-fuels standard would offer motorists healthier energy options, including electric vehicles, and would reduce the devastating impacts of vehicle pollution on the health of Washington families and communities. It would also progressively reduce carbon pollution in our state over the next decade, as we increase the use of cleaner fuel choices.

Last year, Gov. Jay Inslee assembled a Carbon Emissions Reduction Taskforce composed of business, labor, health and public-interest leaders to provide recommendations on the design and implementation of a market-based carbon-pollution program. Building on the task force's results, in December the governor proposed the Carbon Pollution Accountability Act, a cap-and-trade program to help the state cut greenhouse-gas emissions by 2035 (as required by a 2008 state law). He has directed the state Department of Ecology to draft a clean-fuels standard as a component of the plan.

This plan makes economic sense. Indeed, an independent study has concluded that a standard would contribute to an overall lowering of consumer spending on transportation over the next 10 years.

The concept is proven. The problem is urgent. It is time to act. We call on the governor to move forward in establishing a clean-fuels standard.

Our health, communities and economy simply cannot afford another generation of dirty fuel, traffic pollution, health emergencies and other harms caused by our petroleum habit. A clean-fuels standard would help save lives, and would protect the health of our families and neighbors suffering from asthma and other lung and heart diseases.

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