

When it comes to Environmental Management discussions become confusing, accusatory and usually end up with no conclusion. It is good that the subject of Global Climate Change is entering the national debate for the upcoming presidential election.

This time both parties will elevate the importance of the matter and, perhaps, we can start to make a noticeable change in how we treat Mother Earth and the air we breathe.

It is imperative the costs are shared equitably and that no group, nation or race pays the big price while others slide by.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is busy at work drafting a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) that would consider adopting a new, more stringent National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS) for Ozone.

But first, let's not get confused.

We are not talking about global warming that is often the first fanatical thing one thinks of lately when you mention the word Ozone.

Here we are talking about smog that in part is created from combustion sources such as factories and vehicles and other daily human activities.

EPA is under a court order to issue the Proposed Rule by June 20, 2007

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So what happens if EPA sets a more stringent standard for Ozone and moreover, who should care?

Well, a lot of things happen that can and probably will impede growth and economic development.

All small and minority, especially Black-owned businesses, should care most of all.

We are on the upstart.

We have the fastest rate of growth in the number of businesses and dollar sales.

Finally, we are getting it together and it appears that outside sources such as environmental hysteria is going to challenge our new growth.

The last time EPA lowered the Ozone standard many areas of the country were classified as non-attainment, thereby triggering a process requiring states to develop emission control strategies to bring areas into attainment by a certain date.

The emission control strategies required to make such a demonstration of compliance will

impact the economies of local communities by limiting growth and economic expansion, redevelopment and rebuilding, and by raising the cost of goods and services used in our everyday lives.

For example, the rebuilding of New Orleans could come to a halt or be drastically reduced.

This would be tragic!

The economic empowerment driven by small and minority and Black owned businesses is at risk, as is the health and welfare of those low and fixed income families that can least afford it.

Air is not the only thing that impacts the health of those that live in areas that are designated as non-attainment for Ozone.

Without good jobs driven by economic growth, how does one pay for healthcare and a decent standard of living?

The air is clean and is getting cleaner all the time.

EPA has been instrumental over the years in ensuring cleaner air for all Americans.

Oh, how I remember those awful smoggy days in the Los Angeles basin.

Our lungs burning and eyes watering non stop.

For example, between 1970 and 2005, total emissions of the six principal air pollutants dropped by 53 percent.

Moreover, the ozone levels have dropped 20% since 1980.

But one can argue that we are approaching the crossroads of diminishing returns.

How clean is clean and at what price?

We can no longer tolerate a “regulate and punish” mentality driven by a “lower is better” theory of environmental activism that goes well beyond protecting public health with an adequate margin of safety.

Science based on what is “potentially harmful” is dangerous.

EPA is obligated to discharge its duties under the Clean Air Act to ensure that the Nation’s air quality standards are protective of public health.

In that spirit, we should support EPA's decision to include policy options in the Proposed Rule that consider a more stringent Ozone standard.

But we should also insist that EPA include among the range of policy options to be considered in the proposed rule an option to retain the current Ozone standard.

To do otherwise would pre-judge the issue of whether revision of that NAAQS for Ozone is appropriate at this time.

When EPA issues the Proposed Rule, it will formally frame the debate for the public comment process.

If it doesn't include consideration of the current standard as a policy option, the opportunity to do so will be forever lost and the burden of compliance with a more stringent standard will fall to the local communities and the small and minority and Black owned businesses that operate and provide livelihoods within them.

If EPA foregoes this opportunity,
it will not be Environmental Justice – it will be left to Just Us.