

New Mexico Public Health Association

Resolution Passed April 8, 2005

AFFIRMING THE NECESSITY OF A SECURE, SUSTAINABLE, AND HEALTH- PROTECTIVE CLIMATE AND ENERGY POLICY

THE NEW MEXICO PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION,

Recognizing that the impact of America's heavy dependence on fossil fuels and nuclear power is one of the greatest contemporary threats to human health; and

Noting that this impact includes climate change, air pollution, radiological waste, and global competition for energy resources; and

Understanding that fossil fuels and nuclear power are currently the most significant sources of energy used in the United States, accounting for 85 percent and 8 percent of current U.S. energy consumption, respectively (1); and

Noting the correlation between air pollution created by the burning of fossil fuels and human health impacts, including mercury poisoning, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, asthma, reduced lung function, lung cancer, and premature death (2); and

Noting that air pollution resulting from the burning of fossil fuels includes greenhouse gases, such as CO₂, which accumulate in the atmosphere and contribute significantly to increasing global mean temperatures and global climate change, and the during the past 20 years, about three-quarters of human-made carbon dioxide emissions were from burning fossil fuels (3); and

Noting also that numerous scientists now believe that the world will experience massive disruptions when the levels of CO₂ are approximately 400 parts per million and we are currently at approximately 375 parts per million and increasing at 2 ppm a year (4); and

Noting the broad, worldwide scientific consensus regarding the mounting evidence of ecological and public health impacts of climate change (5,6,7,8), and that these impacts are rapidly becoming manifest; and

Acknowledging that the secondary impacts of global climate change, which include food insecurity and population displacements due to increased incidence of extreme weather events and other climatic changes (9), may result in catastrophic social and economic disruption (10), increasing susceptibility of political unrest and violent conflict; and

Recognizing that oil dependence and competition for access to fossil fuels has escalated violence and war (11,12), and that U.S. foreign policy is influenced by the institutional pressure to assure access to oil resources (13); and

Recognizing further that energy infrastructure and the extraction of oil and other fossil fuels exacts heavy environmental and public health impacts, and has traditionally been a target for attack and sabotage throughout the world, resulting in oil spills, habitat destruction, and human casualties, and that the United States' energy infrastructure remains vulnerable to such attacks (14, 15); and

Understanding that the production of energy by nuclear power plants also creates numerous environmental health and security vulnerabilities that remain unresolved (16), including the disposal of hazardous radioactive waste, proliferation concerns, and the threat of nuclear accident or attack at a nuclear power plant could result in a release of radiation, leading to radiation sickness, genetic mutation and cancer, and the contamination of large tracts of land; and

Understanding that conventional agriculture practices have reduced the availability of the soil to store carbon, which has contributed to increased levels of CO₂ in the atmosphere, and that sustainable, organic agriculture can help reverse this condition (20); and

Understanding that maximizing energy efficiency can reduce energy usage by 60% or more and is, in most cases, the cheapest method of energy reduction (21); and

Concluding that creating combinations of energy efficiency and the use of clean renewable power will protect public health and the environment, promote global stability and security, create jobs and stimulate the economy (22, 23); and

Noting that the American Public Health Association adopted a policy in 2004 "Affirming the Necessity of a Secure, Sustainable, and Health-Protective Energy Policy" (24).

Therefore, the New Mexico Public Health Association:

1. Advocates a deliberate, timely, multiphase transition to a global energy strategy that includes the promotion of energy conservation, including the adoption of responsible fuel-economy standards; major improvements in energy efficiency; the development of renewable fuel sources, including wind and solar, for energy production; strengthened controls for greenhouse gas emissions and hazardous air and water pollutants; and the expedited institution of safe and renewable energy sources;
2. Supports immediate state legislative and regulatory efforts to reduce adverse health impacts and to mitigate global climate change, particularly through strategies that limit emission of greenhouse gases and hazardous air pollutants generated by manufacturing, transportation, energy production and other emitting sectors;
3. Supports research and promotion of transitioning to carbon-sequestering, sustainable agriculture practices;

4. Calls on the government of New Mexico to assume a leadership role in a collaborative process to promote a secure, sustainable energy system;
5. Supports increase private and governmental resources for transitioning to renewable energy technologies and energy sufficiency;
6. Pledges its participation in coalitions with other groups sharing common goals, principles, and objectives to ensure a public health perspective is represented in new climate and energy proposals;
7. Recommends the development of educational opportunities for the public to learn more about the environmental health and global security effects of climate and energy policy through content in curricula in schools and programs of public health and continuing education programs.

Implementation Steps for NMPHA

Transmit this resolution to the Governor of the State of New Mexico, relevant Governor's task forces, and the New Mexico Departments of Health and Environment.

Circulate this resolution among other appropriate members of state, county and city governments in New Mexico.

Circulate this resolution among appropriate businesses, industries, and non-profit organizations.

Initiate contact with existing climate and sustainable energy coalitions and stakeholders to strengthen the role of the public health community in developing a new climate and energy policy.

Provide expert testimony when appropriate.

References:

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- 24 American Public Health Association, 2004-6 Affirming the Necessity of a Secure, Sustainable, and Health-Protective Energy Policy, 2004.