

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)
Subcommittee on Environment
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“Reality Check II: The Impact of EPA’s Proposed Ozone Standards on Rural America”
Environment Subcommittee Hearing

April 29, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today to discuss the EPA’s proposal to lower the current ozone standard to somewhere in the range of 65 to 70 parts per billion.

At a hearing last month on this very topic one of the witnesses before the Committee, Dr. Mary Rice, stated that “the [scientific] evidence available seven years ago...has been supplemented by an even greater understanding of the health effects of ozone exposure, including greater exacerbation of respiratory disease in infants and children, worse lung function in healthy adults and those with lung disease...and increased mortality in adults.”

In addition to the adverse public health effects of ozone, we will also hear today about how high levels of ozone negatively affect vegetation and ecosystems. For example, more than 40 years of research shows that long-term ozone exposure results in decreased forest productivity and diminished crop yields.

Representing a state where agriculture is a critical economic driver, I take very seriously the negative effects of ozone on forests and crops. Specifically, an analysis by the EPA states that high levels of ozone may “reduce the value of a whole tree such as Christmas trees.” This is important to my constituents because Oregon is the number one producer of Christmas trees in the nation. All in all, agricultural production accounts for over \$5 billion dollars toward Oregon’s economy.

Furthermore, the Clean Air Act, as passed by Congress, explicitly prohibits the EPA from considering cost when setting an ozone standard. Congress purposefully put the health and well-being of Americans first. Now, more than ever, the American people need a strong EPA to protect their right to clean air and water.

Some will likely argue today that implementing a lower ozone standard is not worth it -- that it will kill jobs and the economy. There is much more evidence showing that on balance, jobs are created and the economy expands following the passage of major environmental reforms. For example, in a report to Congress on the costs and benefits of federal regulations, OMB estimated that major rules promulgated by the EPA between 2003 and 2013 had benefits between \$165 billion and \$850 billion, compared to costs of just \$38 billion to \$46 billion. Such a significant return on investment should prove the obvious: that when the environment is healthy, the economy is healthy.

Let me be clear, I am sensitive to the concerns we will likely hear today. In fact, in my home state of Oregon we recognize the challenges associated with implementing a more stringent standard. Wildfires and the long-range shifting of ozone from Asia will need to be addressed if we are to achieve a lower standard. That said, comments submitted by my home state indicate Oregon's support for the EPA's proposal. Specifically, a letter from David Collier, the Air Quality Manager at the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality states that "Oregon welcomes EPA's proposal to lower the ozone NAAQS [*pronounced NACKS*], based on advice provided by the Clean Air Act Science Advisory Committee, in order to provide the adequate protection to human health and welfare."

Although significant progress has been made in the past 40 years, it is our job to build upon this legacy and ensure that we continue to improve the quality of our air. A strong economy and a healthy environment are not mutually exclusive. We can have both.

The Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee recommended lowering the ozone standard to between 60 and 70 parts per billion in 2008. They disagreed with the standard set by the Bush Administration of 75 parts per billion, stating it was not "sufficiently protective of public health." We should listen to our scientists and our public health professionals and set a standard that is based on the best available science. I am confident in the ingenuity of Americans to address these challenges. We can and must do better for current and future generations.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and again thank you to our witnesses for being here this afternoon. I yield back the balance of my time.