

AMBIENT LEVELS OF BENZENE IN NORTHWEST AIR NEED IMMEDIATE ACTION TO BE REDUCED

Background:

Most of the gasoline used in the Pacific Northwest is derived from oil which comes from Alaska's North Slope. This oil has very high natural levels of benzene. Benzene is a dangerous cancer inducing agent (i.e., a carcinogen).

Under the Bush administration, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has not seen fit to require that this benzene be removed to the same level required for the rest of the United States. The level here now is two to three times higher than in the rest of the country. And in places the ambient level of benzene in the Northwest is as much as 200 times the level considered by EPA to be safe.

Those living along major vehicular thoroughfares are particularly at risk. This includes not only people living in northwest cities but people driving through places such as the Columbia Gorge and visiting parks near highways.

Because this issue was brought to light by Portland newspapers, Senator Ron Wyden (D., OR) pressed EPA to do something to alleviate the problem. However, they will only begin insisting that the benzene levels in the Northwest be reduced beginning in 2012 and will not be brought down to safe levels thereafter for some years.

Resolution:

The Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs supports efforts to require the federal Environmental Protection Agency to take immediate action to reduce benzene levels in the air of the Northwest. There should be no delay in requiring that levels of benzene there be brought down to safe levels as quickly as possible.