

Statement of Dr. Lisa Doggett
Dirty Air, Dirty Power Report Release – June 9, 2004

I am here today as a family physician representing the Austin Chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility. I'm proud to be a part of the release of Clear the Air's new report, Dirty Air, Dirty Power. This report and its associated website document the asthma attacks, heart attacks, lung cancer cases, hospitalizations, and premature deaths linked to power plant pollution.

As a physician, I find this report very impressive and well-researched, but also very troubling. This report uses the EPA's own methodology to show the connection between power plant pollution and death and disease. That connection is clear, and now quantifiable. We have real numbers: nearly 24,000 deaths each year are linked to fine particle pollution from U.S. power plants. That's more deaths from pollution than from drunk driving and more deaths from pollution than from murders. An additional 38,200 heart attacks, 554,000 asthma attacks, 16,200 cases of chronic bronchitis, and over 3 million lost work days are attributable to coal burning power plants' particulate pollution.

When one of my patients suffers from an infection, I prescribe an antibiotic. When I feel that a patient's health is compromised by drinking or smoking, we discuss the need for them to quit. When my patients are suffering from asthma attacks and heart disease because our air is polluted, I feel it is my duty to speak out and demand reform.

Over 1 million Texans live with asthma. Children are more susceptible to air pollutants for a variety of reasons. They breathe faster, often through their mouths, and they continue to play outside when adults would be compelled to go inside. I've seen a lot of kids in my clinic with asthma. Our staff can tell you, we give a lot of breathing treatments and prescribe a lot of inhalers. In Austin, our emergency rooms are crowded with both kids and adults with asthma and other heart and lung problems.

Ozone and particulate matter in the air make asthma and other respiratory illnesses worse, and I see this in my patients on ozone action days. You don't have to be a doctor to know that brown haze is not good for your lungs.

The most hopeful aspect of this report is that it shows of the 24,000 deaths caused by fine particle pollution, 22,000 are preventable with technology we already have available. However, I am concerned that our government is not taking the steps necessary to save these lives.

For decades, tobacco companies denied that their product was harmful. Thousands of people died as a result of hidden and manipulated evidence. Similarly, our own government, which is responsible for protecting our health and our environment, has denied and minimized the dangers posed by pollution.

The Bush Administration, in its four years in office, has sided with industry over public health time and again, weakening the rules put in place to keep our air clean. Two

months after being sworn into office, President Bush reneged on his campaign promise to require mandatory reductions in the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. Vice President Cheney has led a secret energy task force made up of representatives from companies that had been sued for violating the Clean Air Act. The Administration has delayed the deadlines for reducing fine particulates from our air and haze from our national parks. They are now aiming to adopt rules that will allow power plants to emit up to seven times more mercury into our air than current law allows.

These rules benefit the owners of power companies, but they cause direct injury to you and me. We should all be able to expect clean air, but we must realize that without fighting for it, we won't have it.

Fortunately some members of Congress have proposed legislation to reduce pollution. Senator Jefford's bill, which is discussed in this report, would require older plants to install modern pollution controls and limit mercury emissions. This bill would save lives. The power industry may argue that the costs of modern technology are too high. I argue that the costs of pollution are much higher. Thanks to this report, we can now see specifically how much is at stake.

Breathing is not optional. Cleaning up our air should not be optional either. We can't afford to wait any longer to take action. People are dying now, even here in Austin, because of power plant pollution. We have the technology to fix this problem. What is lacking is the political will. Austin Physicians for Social Responsibility calls on our government leaders to protect public health by capping power plant emissions and turning to renewable energy sources.