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Arizona Leaders Gather in South Phoenix to Talk about Soot Air Pollution and the New EPA Standards

Phoenix, AZ – Community leaders gathered today at First New Life Church in South Phoenix to express their appreciation for the [new, tighter Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\) Standards](#) for Soot, or PM 2.5 Particulate Matter air pollution.

The EPA's revised National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for PM 2.5, announced on February 7, 2024, mark a significant step forward in efforts to reduce harmful pollution and improve air quality nationwide and here in Arizona. These updated standards are expected to save lives, enhance public health outcomes by reducing asthma cases and hospital visits, and minimize missed work and school days due to associated health issues.

Communities like South Phoenix have long and disproportionately suffered the consequences of environmental policies that inflicted stark, consistent [disparities in soot exposure](#) between white Americans and Black, Latino, and Asian Americans across the country in both rural and urban settings.

“The announcement from the EPA regarding the reduction of PM (Particulate Matter) levels is not just a policy change; it is a pivotal moment for South Phoenix,” said **Rev. Aubrey Barnwell, pastor at First New Life Church and Chairperson of the African American Christian Clergy Coalition**. “The lowering of PM levels from 12 to 9 micrograms per cubic meter demands our

attention and concerted action. It is a call to protect the health and vitality of our community.”

“The EPA has done their part by updating their health-based standards for very fine particle pollution,” said **Will Humble, executive director for the Arizona Public Health Association**. “Now it's time for the Maricopa County Air Quality Department and Arizona Department of Environmental Quality to roll up their sleeves and figure out what changes need to be made to bring us into compliance with the new standards.”

Leaders discussed solutions, including reducing emissions from power plants and vehicles. Clean vehicle programs, such as the Advanced Clean Cars II Rule, the Advanced Clean Trucks Rule, or the Heavy Duty Omnibus Rule, would all reduce soot pollution, [according to Sierra Club analysis](#). By adopting clean vehicle programs, Arizona could cost-effectively reduce soot pollution, bring its pollution levels closer to compliance with federal standards, and create cleaner, healthier communities.

“These stronger pollution standards will keep more people, including children, out of the emergency rooms. These health-based standards will save lives. The movement in the right direction will help advance environmental justice in our communities and will save dollars too,” said **Sandy Bahr, director for Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon (Arizona) Chapter**. “We look forward to working together to make sure all Arizonans have healthy air to breathe.”

The news conference can be viewed via YouTube [here](#).

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