

AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION HOUSE OF DELEGATES

Resolution: 409  
(A-24)

Introduced by: Medical Student Section and American Association of Public Health  
Physicians

Subject: Toxic Heavy Metals

Referred to: Reference Committee D

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- 1 Whereas, toxic heavy metals (THMs) including mercury, lead, cadmium, chromium, and arsenic  
2 enter the environment through natural processes as well as via anthropogenic activities such as  
3 power plants, landfills, mining, fossil fuel use, urban runoff, and agriculture<sup>1-3</sup>; and  
4  
5 Whereas, national regulations protecting the public from THM exposure are sporadic, eg no air  
6 quality standards for cadmium levels, no regulations on heavy metals in soil<sup>4-6</sup>; and  
7  
8 Whereas, urban farms and gardens are at risk of higher levels of heavy metal contaminants in  
9 soil, air, water, and food<sup>6-9</sup>; and  
10  
11 Whereas, individuals at military bases are chronically exposed to toxic heavy metals due to the  
12 use of burn pits<sup>10</sup>; and  
13  
14 Whereas, the World Health Organization (WHO) ranks the US in the top 10 for highest levels of  
15 arsenic contamination in groundwater, and dangerous levels of arsenic have been found in  
16 drinking water wells in over 25 states, exposing over 2 million people<sup>11-12</sup>; and  
17  
18 Whereas, infant and toddler foods have been found to contain THM levels above recommended  
19 limits by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), although the FDA advises that even low  
20 levels of THMs can accumulate in children causing chronic illness<sup>13</sup>; and  
21  
22 Whereas, American Indian persons are exposed to THMs from historic mining sites and on  
23 average have higher THM blood levels, associated with heart and lung disease risk<sup>14-15</sup>; and  
24  
25 Whereas, low-income and minoritized communities are disproportionately exposed to  
26 chronically high THM levels from hazardous waste sites and air pollution<sup>9,16-23</sup>; and  
27  
28 Whereas, THMs may cause acute adverse effects at high concentrations such as psychosis and  
29 multi-organ toxicities, and chronic exposure, even below current regulatory limits, may increase  
30 risk for heart disease, stroke, dementia, cancer, and infertility<sup>1,3-4,24-25</sup>; and  
31  
32 Whereas, the American Heart Association states that THMs are a direct risk factor for  
33 cardiovascular disease and recommends protections to prevent public exposure and  
34 development of clinical monitoring standards<sup>3-4</sup>; and  
35  
36 Whereas, inconsistency across thresholds between the FDA, EPA, Agency for Toxic  
37 Substances and Disease Registry, and WHO and lack of updates reflecting new research  
38 contribute to difficulty in THM regulation and resulting unchecked bioaccumulation<sup>12,15,26</sup>;  
39 therefore be it

1 RESOLVED, that our American Medical Association urge governmental agencies to establish  
2 and enforce limits for identified hazardous pollutants and heavy metals in our food, water, soil,  
3 and air (Directive to Take Action); and be it further  
4

5 RESOLVED, that our AMA support efforts to monitor and educate individuals on (a) the chronic  
6 effects of exposure to toxic heavy metals including at levels below regulation limits, and (b) the  
7 burden of toxicity in communities, especially near urban, Superfund, and industrial sites.  
8 (New HOD Policy)

Fiscal Note: Modest - between \$1,000 - \$5,000

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## RELEVANT AMA Policy

### H-135.911 Environmental Health Equity in Federally Subsidized Housing

1. Our American Medical Association acknowledges the potential adverse health impacts of living in close proximity to Superfund sites or other contaminated lands.
2. Our AMA advocates for mandated disclosure of Superfund sites or other contaminated lands proximity to those purchasing, leasing, or currently residing in housing in close proximity to Superfund sites or other contaminated lands.
3. Our AMA supports efforts of public agencies to study the safety of proposed public housing expansions with respect to pollutant exposure and to expand construction of new public and publicly subsidized housing properties on lands without demonstrated unsafe levels of hazardous pollutants. [Res. 415, A-23]

### H-135.949 Support of Clean Air and Reduction in Power Plant Emissions:

(1) Our AMA supports (a) federal legislation and regulations that meaningfully reduce the following four major power plant emissions: mercury, carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide; and (b) efforts to limit carbon dioxide emissions through the reduction of the burning of coal in the nation's power generating plants, efforts to improve the efficiency of power plants and continued development, promotion, and widespread implementation of alternative renewable energy sources in lieu of carbon-based fossil fuels. (2) Our AMA will: (a) support the Environmental Protection Agency's proposal, under the Clean Air Act, to regulate air quality for heavy metals and other air toxins emitted from smokestacks. The risk of dispersion through air and soil should be considered, particularly for people living downwind of smokestacks; and (b) urge the EPA to finalize updated mercury, cadmium, and air toxic regulations for monitoring air quality emitted from power plants and other industrial sources, ensuring that recommendations to protect the public's health are enforceable. [Res. 429, A-03; Reaffirmation I-07; Reaffirmed in lieu of Res. 526, A-12; Reaffirmed: Res. 421, A-14; Modified: Res. 506, A-15; Modified: Res. 908, I-17; Appended: Res. 401, A-22]

### D-135.022 Addressing Inequity in Onsite Wastewater Treatment

(1) Our American Medical Association supports that federal, state, local, and tribal, governments suspend enforcement of sanitation laws that could result in criminal charges, fines, jail time, and potential property loss for residents who lack the means to purchase functioning septic systems, especially in underserved communities and American Indian reservations. (2) Our AMA supports research by federal, state, and local governments to develop strategies to reduce insufficient wastewater management and eliminate detrimental health effects due to inadequate wastewater systems. (3) Our AMA will work with interested parties to reduce and eliminate inadequate wastewater treatment systems. [Res. 407, A-23]

### D- 135.997 Environmental Contributors to Disease and Advocating for Environmental Justice

Our AMA will (1) advocate for the greater public and private funding for research into the environment causes of disease, and urge the National Academy of Sciences to undertake an authoritative analysis of environmental causes of disease; (2) ask the steering committee of the Medicine and Public Health Initiative Coalition to consider environmental contributors to disease and environmental racism as a priority public health issues; (3) encourage federal, state, and local agencies to address and remediate environmental injustice, environmental racism, and all other environmental conditions that are adversely impacting health, especially in marginalized communities; and (4) lobby Congress to support ongoing initiatives that include reproductive health outcomes and development particularly in minority populations in Environmental Protection Agency Environmental Justice policies. [Res. 402, A-03; Appended: Res. 927, I-11; Reaffirmed in lieu of: Res. 505, A-19; Modified: Res. 415, A-23]