



WASHINGTON PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility (WPSR) is made up of over 7,000 Washington health professional-led advocates working to create a healthy, just, peaceful and sustainable world. We take on the gravest current threats to human health and survival - nuclear weapons, economic inequity, and a climate crisis driven by dependence on fossil fuels. WPSR leverages the credible and trusted voice of healthcare professionals to educate the public, influence decision-makers, and promote public policies that support our mission.

December 12, 2023

City of Seattle,
Attn: Seattle City Council
P.O. Box 94788
Seattle, WA 98124-7088

Members of the Seattle City Council,

Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility, represented by the undersigned physicians and health professionals in Washington, is writing to voice our **support for the City of Seattle's proposal to establish a Building Emissions Performance Standard (BEPS)** for large commercial and multifamily buildings in order to reduce air pollution, create good paying jobs and create a more sustainable future for Seattle.

As health professionals, we are extremely concerned about the health impacts of indoor and outdoor air pollution (NO_x, PM_{2.5}, ozone) due to burning fossil fuels. Research from the University of Washington clearly shows these harmful chemicals are contributing to dozens of premature deaths yearly in our community, particularly in children from asthma, and the elderly from cardiac and respiratory diseases. Disadvantaged communities with the highest air pollution have life expectancies 7 years lower than their neighbors.¹ Indoor air pollution in buildings from heating and cooking with natural gas also aggravates asthma and respiratory infections and worsens academic performance in children.² Air pollution from Washington state buildings imposes an estimated \$6.2 billion annually in health care costs.³ As the BEPS policy will transition Seattle's large buildings to energy-efficient heat

¹https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d744c68218c867c14aa5531/t/5e0edc05d2e16f330fa0071d/1578032180988/CHIA_low_res+report.pdf

² Shier, V., Nicosia, N., Shih, R. et al. Ambient air pollution and children's cognitive outcomes. *Popul Environ* 40, 347–367 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-019-0313-2>

³ <https://rmi.org/health-air-quality-impacts-of-buildings-emissions/#WA>

pumps which will significantly reduce health-harming and heat-trapping air pollution, **passing this standard offers the Council the opportunity to ensure a healthier future for all Seattle residents.**

We have first hand experiences in our practices seeing patients whose acute and chronic medical conditions are exacerbated by poor air quality, both indoors and outdoors. Since meaningful improvements in air quality are technically achievable we, as health professionals have a duty to advocate for our patients to protect their well-being.

These BEPS standards will cool and heat large buildings for resilience against extreme heat events, like the PNW heat dome of June 2021 that caused hundreds of excess deaths in Washington state. In heat waves, people over 65 without air conditioning are four times more likely to die from heat-related illnesses than those with air conditioning.⁴ BEPS is expected to reduce Seattle's heat-trapping climate pollution from buildings by over 25% by 2050. Seattle must be a leader in the global campaign to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by mid-century and BEPS is one important element.

The BEPS proposal represents a compromise among many stakeholders. The Office of Sustainability and the Environment estimates BEPS will create hundreds of good-paying green jobs which are essential for our transition to clean energy.⁵ By encouraging the use of new federal tax incentives for clean energy upgrades that future-proof their assets, BEPS also benefits building owners.

As health professionals, we are grateful for your efforts to build a healthier, sustainable Seattle. We encourage you to swiftly pass the Building Emissions Performance Standard.

Regards,
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility

Signatories:

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⁴ Bouchama A, Dehbi M, Mohamed G, Matthies F, Shoukri M, Menne B. Prognostic factors in heat wave related deaths: a meta-analysis. Arch Intern Med. 2007 Nov 12;167(20):2170-6. doi: 10.1001/archinte.167.20.ira70009. Epub 2007 Aug 13.

⁵ <https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/OSE/Building%20Energy/BEPS-Proposed-Policy-Guide.pdf>