

For Immediate Release

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## COMMUNITY GROUPS SUE EPA OVER WEAKENED AIR STANDARDS ENDANGERING DENVER NEIGHBORHOODS

Community organizations representing neighborhoods in north Denver adjacent to I-70 joined the Sierra Club Tuesday in a suit to challenge new EPA guidance relied upon by the Colorado Department of Transportation to determine that increased emissions from the expanded interstate highway would not violate national air quality standards. CDOT is proposing to eventually expand the current 6 lane highway to 10 travel lanes and 4 frontage lanes.

Under EPA's earlier Clean Air Act requirements, the project could not qualify for federal funds because it would cause particulate pollution to violate the air standards on high pollution days. Under EPA's latest guidance, which it issued with no public notice last November, multiple high pollution days would not be counted against the standard allowing the project to receive federal funds. The suit, filed in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, challenges EPA's revision of the methodology for determining compliance with the standard.

Denver Environmental Health reported in 2014 that residents in the north Denver neighborhoods adjacent to I-70 experience a 70% greater rate of mortality from heart disease than other neighborhoods in Denver not affected by highway pollution, and 40% greater frequency of urgent care for children suffering from severe asthma compared to other parts of Denver. CDOT's analysis of air quality after the proposed expansion of I-70 shows a further degradation of air quality. This will exacerbate these health impacts, especially on seniors and children in the primarily minority and low-income communities of Globeville, Elyria and Swansea.

The EPA identified heart disease and asthma as the diseases most strongly linked to exposure to particle pollution, which is emitted by diesel trucks. This evidence convinced the EPA to tighten the national health standard for fine particles in 2012. For the first time EPA required states to monitor fine particles in neighborhoods adjacent to major highways.

A new near-highway monitor installed by Colorado last year in the Globeville neighborhood near the interchange between I-70 and I-25 is recording levels that significantly exceed the national air quality standard for fine particles. A population exposure study commissioned by the Sierra Club shows that approximately 10,000 residents of north Denver reside within 1000 feet of I-70.

"CDOT now has a golden opportunity to correct a half-century of harm done to Denver citizens," said Becky English of Sierra Club's Rocky Mountain Chapter. "We hope this lawsuit causes CDOT to investigate removing the traffic and pollution from north Denver neighborhoods." The organizations joining the Sierra Club in the suit include Citizens for a Greater Denver, the Elyria and Swansea Neighborhood Association, and the Cross Community Coalition. Drew Dutcher, president of the Elyria and Swansea group explained why they sued: "The residents of the Elyria and Swansea know many neighbors who, because of the pollution, have suffered debilitating diseases, died of pollution-related causes, or moved away. We need to protect ourselves."

The groups also are calling on elected officials at all levels including Senators Michael Bennet and Corey Gardner, Congressperson Diana DeGette, Governor John Hickenlooper and Mayor Michael Hancock to protect residents living in proximity to I-70 by re-routing interstate traffic from the dense neighborhoods of north Denver onto I-76 and I-270 through commercial/ industrial neighborhoods.

The groups are represented by Robert Yuhnke, a Clean Air Act expert and former senior attorney at Environmental Defense Fund.

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