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## Vehicular air pollution linked to myriad maladies

Report attacks Bush administration and Legacy Highway

By Lois M. Collins

Deseret Morning News

Air pollution from motor vehicles increases rates of cancer, asthma, premature and low-birthweight babies and creates other health woes. And the closer you live to congested roads, the greater the danger to your health, says a report issued Wednesday by an environmental group.

"Highway Health Hazards," produced for the Sierra Club, looks at 24 different peer-reviewed studies published in the past decade — including one from Brigham Young University — to conclude that "a critical consequence" of reliance on and construction of highways is increased health problems.

"This study shows the weight of the evidence. Why is it important? Because every American either drives in a car or lives near a road," said the club's Brett Hulseley during a question-and-answer session following the study's release.

The report also criticizes the Bush administration and goes after Utah's Legacy Highway project.

The president's proposal to reduce federal financial support for mass transit projects by 30 percentage points to 50-50 (federal and local match) while maintaining federal funding for highway projects at current 80-20 levels is the wrong thing to do, Hulseley said.

Among the report's findings:

- A study conducted in part by C. Arden Pope,

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professor and epidemiologist at BYU, found that "air pollution is a major risk to our health and safety and is the contributing cause of nearly 100,000 premature deaths each year." It was published in the

## Annual Review of Public Health.

Since that 1994 report, Pope's research has also linked air pollution to heart ills. Last December, in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*, Pope said it causes inflammation that is a key cause of heart ills. And heart woes are a more common result of pollution than respiratory ills.

- Soot in diesel exhaust is linked to lung cancer, cardiopulmonary disease and more, according to a study from the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

- Another journal study found that when Atlanta increased public transportation and used other traffic-control measures during the 1996 Olympics, acute asthma episodes among children dropped 44 percent. Ozone concentrations fell 29 percent and morning peak traffic was down 22.5 percent.

- Denver researchers showed that children who live close to high-traffic roads are up to eight times more apt to develop leukemia or other cancers. Researchers had been looking for a link between power lines and increased cancer but found only weak ties, said Howard Wachtel of the University of Colorado, one of the researchers. It found "a strong association" between the cancers and proximity to busy roads.

- Pregnant women living near busy roads had more premature and low-birthweight babies, according to a University of California Los Angeles study.

- Multiple studies by the International Center for Technology Assessment showed that the concentration of toxic air pollution inside cars is greater than that outside.

- A study from the Netherlands links living by busy roads to shorter life spans.

Utah Department of Transportation officials don't argue with the Sierra Club's contention that motor vehicles increase unhealthy pollution. But they take a very different view of road projects such as the Legacy Highway project in Davis County.

Where the Sierra Club and its report singled out the project as one of 10 major problem areas when it comes to traffic and health, UDOT sees Legacy as part of the pollution solution. The report calls on Utah to "postpone new road building and change their priority to building a regional transit system first." UDOT believes getting the project done will ease potential health woes related to traffic.

There's no question that traffic congestion pollutes as cars drive slower and there's a lot of braking, said Nile Easton, a UDOT spokesman. It prolongs the emissions from individual vehicles on a given stretch of road.

But the Legacy project will ease traffic congestion and reduce the slowdowns and stops-and-starts that make more pollution, he said.

UDOT does not directly evaluate the health impacts of a proposed road project, but it must meet air-quality standards set for each area and account for the impact of construction on those air quality numbers, "which are based on good health practices," Easton said.

How close one is to the heavily traveled (defined as 20,000 or more vehicles each day on a road segment) roads has a big impact on



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how serious health effects are, said Dr. Tim Buckley, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, during the briefing.

Hulsey suggests people look for clean transportation options, such as public transit or low-emission vehicles. And they should try to live as far away from busy roads as possible.

Buckley said air cleaners and filters inside the home will help reduce pollution that originated outside.

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*E-mail: [lois@desnews.com](mailto:lois@desnews.com)*



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