

News Release
September 1, 2000
For Immediate Release:

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For more information: www.areco.org

Emergency reduction of O'Hare flights petitioned

Arlington Heights, IL, September 1, 2000—The Alliance of Residents Concerning O'Hare (ARECO), a citizen's O'Hare Airport watchdog organization based in Arlington Heights, has petitioned the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency calling for an emergency, mandatory reduction of flights at Chicago's O'Hare Airport on Ozone Action Alert Days.

Citing that O'Hare, based on data from other airports, is the region's largest producer of ozone (smog) emissions, ARECO petitioned IEPA's Director Thomas Skinner asking him for an emergency regulation of the airport that, because of interstate commerce protection, is virtually exempt from environmental regulation. ARECO called for a 30% reduction in flights in order to adequately protect the health of more than half of the population of the state who appear to be affected by the far-reaching emissions of the airport's and aircraft operations.

A recent study of Toronto, Canada by the Department of Health showed that smog (ground based ozone) kills 1,000 annually and that thousands more treated in hospital for illnesses linked to pollutants. The study showed further that about 5,500 people were admitted to hospitals each year with smog-related illnesses.

Monica Campbell, a Toronto public health toxicologist and one of the authors of the study said, "There are a thousand people dying each year and that is the equivalent of four international jets crashing each year in our city."

The study said also showed that, contrary to popular belief, poor air quality is not only a summertime health concern, because the six pollutants are in the air all year. In fact, three of the pollutants - carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and sulphur dioxide - are present in higher levels in winter than in the summer. These three account for 80 per cent of all air pollution-related deaths in the Toronto.

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Likewise, the Chicagoland area already suffers from seriously unhealthy levels of ozone. The health problems can be very grave for the young, old and sick who are least able to defend themselves. "We are not aware of the number of people that get sick or die each year but one must consider that they are very numerous considering the smaller population of Toronto in comparison to Chicago and the amount of flights from the airports," stated Jack Saporito, executive director of AReCO.

In a letter from the Natural Resources Defense Council to President Clinton asking him to veto HR 1000, a bill that would massively increase aviation, the NRDC stated that "Major airports produce as much ozone-forming volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides as major power plants, yet these emissions are largely outside the scope of state implementation plans under the Clean Air Act." President Clinton signed the bill, now known as the AIR-21 Act into law, this May.

While ozone precursors are of a different category of air pollutants causing different types of health problems, AReCO's concern was raised after the recent release of Park Ridge's O'Hare Toxic Pollution and Cancer Risk Study. It shows that O'Hare is the worst producer of carcinogens and other toxic pollution in the state of Illinois affecting 98 communities, in generally a 32-mile radius of the airport, subjecting millions of Illinois citizens to unacceptable health risks. Park Ridge Mayor Ron Wietecha stated, "This report concludes that O'Hare airport is the number one toxic polluter in the state of Illinois."

In its petition to the IEPA, AReCO stated its concern, because O'Hare is, most probably, also the worst producer of ozone precursors. It is based on the fact that Kennedy and LaGuardia airports separately, are the largest producers of nitrogen oxide in New York City. "They're (airports) some of the heaviest polluters in the United States," states Dr. Max Shauck, Baylor's aviation science department director. "Kennedy (airport) in New York is the largest source of nitrogen oxide in New York, LaGuardia's next. They are also the second and third largest sources of hydrocarbons."

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Incredibly, O'Hare Airport has more landings and take-offs than both airports combined, basically three times the amount of flight operations than either single New York airport.

AReCO's Saporito said "The public and many heavily regulated industries I am sure will be shocked to learn that O'Hare (the aviation industry) is generally not regulated because of interstate commerce protection; yet, it is by and large, the worst polluter in the state. Thus far, industry has taken meaningless steps to address the problem, such as reducing ground vehicle emissions that generally are the least of the problem."

Today, and for the next few days Ozone Action Alert Days, the public is urged to cut back on their activities, almost unjustly, and urged not to even mow their lawns. Yet, just one 747 aircraft take-off is equivalent to operating four state's worth of lawnmowers for 20 minutes (2.4 million lawnmowers).

According to Dr. Shauck "In ozone the health cost is billions of dollars and there are a couple of billions (in) crop loss with ozone. This is not just touchy-feely environmentalism."

Clearly, the public needs to be protected immediately.

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Petition to IEPA Director Skinner follows: