

New international initiative stresses need for global action on air pollution as health impacts remain high

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The National Academies of Sciences and Medicine from South Africa, Brazil, Germany, and the United States of America have joined forces to

issue an urgent call to action on harmful air pollution. They are calling for a new global compact to improve collaboration on the growing problem, and for governments, businesses and citizens to reduce air pollution in all countries. The academies launched their call with the publication of a science-policy statement, which was handed over in a ceremony today at the UN headquarters to senior UN representatives and high-level diplomats from South Africa, Brazil, Germany, and the United States of America.

In the statement, the five National Academies are also jointly calling for immediate action from all levels of society. This includes a request for emissions controls in all countries and proper monitoring of key pollutants—especially PM_{2.5}. PM_{2.5} is one of the smallest particulates in the air we breathe, which can enter and impact all organs of the body. The science academies specify the need for increased funding to tackle the problem and substantial investment in measures to reduce [air pollution](#). This can also help to reduce climate change and contribute to meeting the goal of limiting average global warming to 1.5°C.

With this statement, the academies provide further scientific input for the global climate action summit, which the UN Secretary General will hold in September this year and where [air pollution](#) and health will be an issue of great concern. The five National academies invite science academies, research institutes, universities and individual scientists worldwide to join the initiative and to strengthen research and science-policy activities in the area of "Air Pollution and Health."

- Executive Officer Himla Soodyall from the Academy of Science of South Africa says: "The health impacts of air pollution are enormous, it can harm health across the entire lifespan, causing disease, disability, and death. It is time to move the issue much higher up in the policy agenda. Strengthening synergies with other policy areas, including sustainable development, climate

change and [food security](#) is important."

- President Marcia McNutt of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences says: "If we do not urgently address this global challenge, air pollution will continue to take a startling toll in terms of preventable disease, disability, and death, as well as in avoidable costs of care. The good thing is that air pollution can be cost-effectively controlled. We need to act much more decisively. We need more public and private investments to tackle air pollution that match the scale of the problem."
- Foreign-Secretary Margaret Hamburg of the U.S. National Academy of Medicine says: "We are only at the beginning of what we hope to achieve. Our five academies have launched the call, but tackling this issue will need the participation of many more stakeholders. We invite science academies, research institutes, universities and individual scientists worldwide to join the initiative to help solve this global crisis. We also hope that policy-makers and the public will engage with us to improve the future health of people and the planet."
- President Luiz Davidovich of the Brazilian Academy of Sciences says: "Air pollution and climate change share an important, common source: the combustion of fossil fuels, that is why tackling air pollution will also help us make progress towards combating [climate change](#)."
- President Jörg Hacker of the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina says: "National Academies are uniquely placed to address complex issues such as the interplay between air pollution and health. Academies are independent fora where scientists from all disciplines come together to exchange and reflect upon their findings. Such a collaboration across disciplines is essential to find solutions to these problems."

Unequivocal scientific evidence shows that air pollution affects human health across our entire lifespan. It can affect everyone, even unborn

babies, with young, old and vulnerable people impacted the most. The health impacts include the premature deaths of at least 5 million people per year, as well as chronic health conditions like heart disease, asthma, COPD, diabetes, allergies, eczema and skin aging. Air pollution also contributes to cancer, stroke and slows lung growth of children and adolescents. Evidence is growing that air pollution contributes to dementia in adults and impacts brain development in children.

Burning of fossil fuels and biomass for heat, power, transport and food production is the main source of air pollution. The global economic burden of disease caused by air pollution across 176 countries in 2015 was estimated to be USD 3.8 trillion. Measures, which could have positive impacts on reducing air pollution, are woefully underinvested in.

The academies state that both private and public investments are insufficient and do not match the scale of the problem. Air pollution is preventable. With sufficient action suffering and deaths from dirty air can be avoided. Clean air is as vital to life on earth as clean water. Air pollution control and reduction must now be a priority for all.

More information: The full statement is available online: www.air-pollution.health

Provided by Leopoldina

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