

**Wednesday, July 26, 2017**

**Commissioner Jessica Vega Pederson  
Statement regarding Cleaner Air Oregon**

Two winters ago our community was rocked by the news that harmful toxins were being spewed into our air at alarming rates. Words like hexavalent chromium, selenium and lead poisoning were suddenly household words. The fear and anger in our neighborhoods was palpable.

Hundreds of people turned out to community meetings to voice their frustration, concerns, and alarm about the lack of health-based air quality standards and regulations. The outrage was and is fully warranted.

In response to this outcry, our Governor, Kate Brown, began a new process - the Cleaner Air Oregon initiative - to write a new slate of regulations to protect the air we all breathe. Because clean air is more than just an environmental issue. It's a health issue and an economic issue.

We've seen the health impacts of industrial emissions take their toll on our public health; and too often, low-income communities and communities of color living near the sources of these emissions bear the brunt of those negative impacts. Yet having clean, healthy air is a major boost to our economy. Our workforce will be healthier and more productive, and our community will be an attractive place to start or expand a business.

Unfortunately, this year the Legislature failed to do their part in protecting our air. They made the wrong choice. By failing to adequately fund the Cleaner Air Oregon initiative, the legislature decided they would put the interests of polluters ahead of the interests of the people. The legislature was asked to require polluters to pay just a little bit more so that we could properly implement these new health-based regulations. They failed to make polluters pay. Strike one!

That left our leaders with another choice: leave the taxpayers on the hook, or fail to protect our air. Those aren't two great options, but lawmakers decided to not protect clean air at all - and that's strike two.

Now our backs are against the wall, and we must do better. We need strong, health-based standards that protect our most vulnerable. We need common sense regulations on polluters who currently have no reason or requirement to regulate themselves. We need our state's leaders to step up and adequately fund the Cleaner Air Oregon initiative - and make the polluters pay for it.

If the state fails to take the necessary steps to protect our clean air, we at the local level will act ourselves. we will protect the health of those in our community. But the better policy is to protect the health of all Oregonians. After all, if I'm visiting The Dalles I want to know I'm breathing clean air. If I'm in Hillsboro I want to know I'm breathing clean air. If I'm in La Grande I want to know I'm breathing clean air. And we care about the health of our fellow Oregonians living in these areas and throughout the state. We want and need strong and enforced statewide health standards, and we should demand nothing less.

I know that all of you here understand the importance of clean air. That's why you're here today. Because clean air isn't just about us. It's about our children. It's about our future. That's why I'm counting on all of you to make your voices heard, and tell our leaders that they must act. I'm confident that together, we can accomplish anything. Including protecting our air.