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ATS Welcomes EPA's Proposed Rules to Limit Carbon Emissions from Existing Power Plants

June 2, 2014 -- The American Thoracic Society is pleased that the Environmental Protection Agency is taking action to address carbon pollution. The proposed rules released today by the EPA to reduce carbon pollution from existing power plants are an important next step in the Administration's efforts to address global climate change and improve air quality.

"As a pediatric pulmonologist who cares for children with severe health problems, we are beginning to recognize the health effects of global warming in our practices," said ATS President Tom Ferkol, MD, who is professor of pediatrics, cell biology, and physiology and director of the multidisciplinary Division of Pediatric Allergy, Immunology, and Pulmonary Medicine at the Washington University School of Medicine. "The ATS strongly supports the efforts of President Obama and the EPA to reduce the harmful emissions of greenhouse gasses from power plants. Today's rules are a step in the right direction toward mitigating climate change.

"What often gets lost in the discussion is that reducing carbon emissions also decreases other noxious pollutants like mercury, ozone and particulate matter," noted Ferkol. Mercury, ozone and particulate matter are known pollutants that cause neurological damage, respiratory and cardiovascular disease. "By reducing carbon pollution today, our children will enjoy the benefits of cleaner air while we address a major cause of global warming."

George D. Thurston, ScD, vice chair of the ATS Environmental Health Policy Committee and professor at NYU Langone Medical Center's Institute of Environmental Medicine, said: "The evidence base supporting the link between climate change and adverse health consequences, which comes from a number of scientific disciplines, is extensive."

A recent ATS workshop report on the Respiratory Health Effects of Global Climate Change enumerated a number of the adverse effects on respiratory health of global climate change, which include:

- changing pollen releases impact asthma and allergic rhinitis,
- heat waves cause critical care-related diseases,
- climate-driven air pollution exacerbates a number of pulmonary conditions, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and associated cardiovascular diseases,
- desertification increases particulate matter (PM) exposures, and
- climate-related changes in food and water security are associated with infectious respiratory diseases through malnutrition.

For further comment, Dr. Thurston can be reached at gdt1@nyu.edu and Dr. Ferkol can be reached at Ferkol_T@kids.wustl.edu