

impact of poor air quality on my patients — from childhood asthma attacks to heart attacks and strokes in adults. The good news? Solutions are within reach through clean energy and electric vehicles (EVs). However, unelected billionaires are pushing policies that threaten to pause the payout of critical funding for clean energy programs. This would jeopardize Arizona's economic and public health progress and undo years of work toward a cleaner, healthier future.

Arizona's Air Pollution Crisis and Climate Crisis

According to the American Lung Association's Arizona Fact Sheet of the State of the Air 2024 report, nearly 84% of Arizonans live in a community with unhealthy air. Cities like Phoenix rank among the most polluted in the country, with high levels of ozone and particulate pollution. Tucson's air quality is also troubling, with Pima County receiving an F grade for ozone pollution.

These pollutants inflame the lungs, trigger asthma, and worsen heart disease. Meanwhile, rising temperatures intensify this problem, increasing ozone formation and increasing emergency department visits for heat-related heart attacks, strokes, and other cardiovascular complications. Arizona's increasingly frequent and intense heat waves make this issue especially urgent. Low-income and communities of color bear the brunt of these impacts, experiencing disproportionately high rates of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. For other vulnerable populations — including those with pre-existing conditions, the elderly, outdoor workers, and the homeless — these climate-driven health risks can also be deadly.

The Path to Cleaner Air and Healthier Communities

Gasoline-powered vehicles and fossil-fuel-based power plants are the largest contributors to harmful emissions. The transportation sector is the

transition to clean energy more affordable and accessible for all. Key provisions include federal tax credits of up to \$7,500 for new electric vehicles (EVs) and \$4,000 for used EVs, making cleaner transportation more attainable for Arizona families. Households can also access thousands of dollars in rebates for energy-efficient appliances, home insulation upgrades, and clean electricity transitions, reducing reliance on polluting power plants. Additionally, significant investments in wind and solar energy will cut fossil fuel dependence and improve air quality, particularly benefiting communities heavily impacted by pollution.

Time is running out. Act now to embrace clean energy and EVs! Take advantage of available tax credits before they disappear. You can reduce air pollution, cut energy costs, and create a healthier future by switching today.

A Prescription for a Healthier Future

The science is clear: Clean energy protects hearts and lungs. As a physician, I urge Arizona's congressional representatives to protect these critical programs and embrace the transition to clean energy and electric transportation. Every EV on the road and every solar panel installed means cleaner air, fewer hospital visits, and longer, healthier lives — all while lowering our bills. A true win-win!

Let's recognize that protecting our hearts isn't just about diet and exercise — it's also about the air we breathe. We are investing in our collective health and future by using clean energy.

Visit azhpea.org/solutions to help build a healthier Arizona today.

Noah Tolby is an emergency medicine physician and faculty member at the University of Arizona College of Medicine. He has been recognized for his clinical teaching and mentorship excellence. His work focuses on medical education, emergency care, and serving underserved communities.

TUCSON OPINION

Lead in Hudbay tailings would threaten children

The following is the opinion and analysis of the writer:

Hudbay's 2023 Pre-Feasibility Study shows that their Copper World project plans to dump massive amounts of mining waste containing lead, arsenic, and other hazardous materials within 600 feet of houses and 1 1/2 miles from Copper Ridge Elementary School in Corona de Tucson. I am appealing to the public, which may be unaware that this lead would threaten the lives of children who live near the proposed mine.

I feel so strongly about this danger that I have spoken out at public hearings and sent written comments to the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality and to publicly elected officials.

Where did I learn about the dangers of lead? In the early 1990s, I worked as a special educator conducting psycho-educational evaluations at the Kennedy Krieger Institute (KKI), affiliated with Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, MD. Doctors and scientists at KKI study children and young adults

with developmental disorders. I am still haunted by memories of children I tested who had been poisoned by lead, a neurotoxin that damages the developing brain and is most dangerous to those under the age of 6.

According to Stanford University's fact sheet about the effects of lead poisoning in children, lead poisoning can affect just about every system in the body with a bewildering array of symptoms that can include:

- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Behavior and learning problems
- Hearing problems
- Headaches
- Anemia

Very high blood lead levels (BLL) can cause convulsions, coma, and death. But even low levels are dangerous. Both the American Medical Association and the national Centers for Disease Control (CDC) emphasize that "There is no known safe BLL." And representatives from the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality agreed with my comments at their Aug. 14, 2024, informational meeting in Vail, stating, "Yes, there is no safe lead level for children, that is scientifically a fact."

Children of parents whose work brings them into contact with lead may be at additional

risk. The American Journal for Public Health (AJPH) devoted a special issue to this "take home lead" health emergency, warning how adults may transfer lead from their work clothes to their homes. The journal also emphasized how important it is to monitor for air-borne lead at ground level and in the soil where children play. Such monitoring will be essential, given that strong Arizona winds will almost certainly blow dust from the tailings piles into neighboring communities.

We must stand up for the safety of our children. Given what we know about lead, how can the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality justify the air permit they gave Copper World in January that will allow it to pile tailings so close to homes? Why is the State of Arizona putting the economic interests of a foreign mining company above the health of our children? Fortunately, Save the Scenic Santa Ritas is fighting to protect our children by appealing this dangerous permit. We citizens must demand that the Department of Environmental Quality give in to the appeal and revoke the air permit.

Peggy Ollerhead is a retired special educator, school psychologist, and a grandmother.

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