

WASHINGTON, D.C.---Today, Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), criticized the Bush administration's decision to give an early Christmas present to polluting power plants. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Energy (DOE) announced final changes to the New Source Review (NSR) program of the 1970 Clean Air Act and made new proposed changes today. The NSR program requires the oldest and dirtiest power plants to install the pollution control devices required for modern plants when they make major modifications that substantially increase pollution. The Administration's changes would effectively allow power plants to modernize their facilities without adding the pollution controls that protect public health in the U.S.

"This is another example of the Bush Administration's rollback of environment and public health laws," said Blumenauer. "Under previous administrations, including that of George Bush Sr., the EPA articulated a commitment to maintain and safeguard the environmental and public health benefits achieved by the Clean Air Act. I fear that changes to the New Source Review program will ultimately result in an increase in emissions of pollutants around the country. It is no coincidence that the Bush administration has waited until the end of the day Friday, when the public's attention is focused on the upcoming holiday season, to release their new policy."

Last month, Congressman Blumenauer joined over 100 Democrats in sending a letter to President Bush urging him to oppose the EPA's proposed changes to the NSR program. Unfortunately, the President ignored pleas from Democrats, environmentalists, and health advocates, and decided to go ahead with the NSR changes.

Blumenauer pointed out that in Oregon, the changes to the Clean Air Act could allow power plants to double their emissions of nitrogen oxide and sulfur dioxide, two pollutants that are associated with a variety of serious health impacts including increased asthma attacks and even premature death. The power plants in the Washington, DC metropolitan area alone are responsible for over 250 deaths per year, from soot pollution, almost 20,000 asthma attacks, and 3,700 emergency room visits. If these plants were to install up to date pollution controls, most of these deaths, asthma attacks, and emergency room visits could be avoided. However, the rule change that EPA proposed will allow the old power plants in and around Washington, DC to continue to pollute for decades.

Blumenauer added, "I find it hard to believe that the Administration can ignore the science that links asthma, heart disease, lung problems, and premature death to air pollution. Again, the Bush administration is sacrificing public health for the good favor of its friends in the energy industry."