

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 23, 2004

## *CO<sub>2</sub>, Climate Change and Public Health in the Urban Environment*

**May 6, 2004**

**Staff and Member Briefing**

**3:00 pm-4:30 pm**

**2318 Rayburn**

*Sponsored by*

*The Center for Health and the Global Environment, Harvard Medical School*

Dear Colleague:

We encourage you to accept the sponsor's invitation to attend a briefing sponsored by the Center for Health and the Global Environment at Harvard Medical School on the public health threats posed by the build-up of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and climate change. These dual threats disproportionately affect the urban underprivileged and poor populations in the US and in developing nations.

The incidence of asthma in the US has nearly tripled in two decades. This growing affliction of children and adults is exacerbated by increases in allergens associated with CO<sub>2</sub> and climate change. Increases in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> -- due largely to fossil fuel combustion -- promote the production of ragweed pollen and the growth of molds. As the timing of the seasons shifts with climate change, certain tree pollens are also appearing earlier in spring.

Extreme weather events, including floods and prolonged droughts, are taking an enormous toll on food production, water quality, and human health in many developing nations. In the US, heat waves usher unhealthy air masses into urban centers, which are laden with air pollutants (also derived from burning fossil fuels), and the combination of factors leads to suffering, and even death, in urban populations from asthma, heat waves and infectious diseases. Climate change also affects the distribution and spread of infectious diseases, such as West Nile virus, in the US and overseas.

This briefing will present the most up-to-date science concerning the health impacts of climate change and fossil fuel combustion, with particular emphasis on vulnerable populations in urban areas in the US. This is an issue of environmental justice and environmental health: people and children of color suffer and die from asthma at disproportionately high rates. The briefing will also explore means to decrease these threats by reducing fossil fuel dependence and expanding opportunities for stimulating economic growth, creating new jobs and alleviating poverty through a properly-financed transition to clean energy.