

Policy Matters



Your weekly digest of policy reports that **matter**.
Edited by [Toby Green](#) and [Gary Price](#) of *Policy Commons*.

Kate Nyhan, our second Guest Editor, is the Research and Education Librarian for Public Health at Cushing/Whitney Medical Library, Yale University. Kate's edition centers on air quality, a topic that's important for health in country settings at all income levels. You'll find her bio below, and if you would like to follow in her footsteps and guest edit a future issue of this newsletter, do [get in touch!](#)

"We all need clean air to live, grow, and thrive"

That's the tagline of the [Clean Air Fund](#), a global air pollution initiative, and they're right. Polluted air is a leading cause of premature death, morbidity, and economic losses. Catch up on the issue by reading CAF's [The State of Global Air Quality Funding 2024](#). Investigating international development funding for outdoor air quality, CAF found that only one percent of such funding is earmarked for clean air, and the most polluted countries aren't getting their fair share of that one percent.

Air quality and environmental justice

Air quality disparities are an issue in the Global North, too. Two reports from the [New York City Environmental Justice Alliance](#) investigate air quality in New York City. In [Heat-Related Risks, Air Pollution, and Social Vulnerability in New York City](#) (2024), experts and community-based organizations explored the combined impact of urban heat islands and air pollution from particulate matter. In [Prioritizing Justice in New York State Climate Policy: Cleaner Air for Disadvantaged Communities?](#) (2023), experts modeled the impact of policies inspired by the state Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, exploring the additional impact of policies advocated by local environmental justice communities. Good documents to read while commuting into a "clean air zone" via public transit!

What's happening with air quality information in light of turmoil in the US federal government?

Some air quality information has been caught up in the Trump administration's removal of environmental justice resources like EJScreen, an Environmental Protection Agency tool that provided map-based access to National Air Toxics Assessment modeling of exposure and health risks from air pollution. EJScreen is not currently accessible on the EPA website. [Public Environmental Data Partners offers an unofficial reconstruction of EJScreen 2.3](#), with census-tract-level data for variables including PM2.5, ozone, and toxic releases to air.

Another aspect of the US federal government's work on air quality is the ARPA-H program [BREATHE: Building Resilient Environments for Air and Total Health](#). The goals described in their two-part "matchmaking webinars" ([Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), May 2024) are exciting: biosensors, respiratory risk assessment software, and cost-effective systems to deliver healthier air. BREATHE awards were intended to commence in February 2025, but it's not clear whether that is on track, and the head of ARPA-H, Renee Wegrzyn, has been laid off.

Air quality in schools

A different resource and one that's still available, US IAQ, was codeveloped by the U.S. Green Building Council's [Center for Green Schools](#) along with EPA and the Department of Energy. The online training course "Clean Air in Buildings Challenge for Schools" (2025) covers school IAQ best practices related to ventilation, filtration, and monitoring. The free, asynchronous course takes three hours. Or, try the Center's [overview fact sheet](#) (2023).

Policy surveillance and indoor air quality

The [Center for Public Health Law Research](#) at Temple University defines policy surveillance as "the systematic, scientific collection and analysis of laws of public health significance." If you're coming from a research tradition outside of legal scholarship, policy surveillance might remind you of scoping reviews: evidence synthesis that is rigorous, comprehensive, and exploratory. In the IAQ space, check out the Environmental Law Institute's [Database of \[United States\] State Indoor Air Quality Laws](#). The [ELI](#) also has a report on [Wildfire Smoke: State Policies for Reducing Indoor Exposure](#) (2024). Legal IAQ information has also been collected for other countries and settings, such as [IAQ Legislation fact sheet](#) (2022) from the [Canadian Centre for Occupation Health and Safety](#), and the five-minute summary of [The legal framework for indoor air quality in health care settings and nursing homes](#) (2024, in French) by [l'Anap \(the French Agency for Care Performance\)](#). Some air quality policy surveillance efforts are international in scope, like [OpenAQ's Air Quality Index Hub](#), which collates the methodologies of air quality indices from twenty-five countries and regions, allowing for harmonization.

Keeping up to date

Finding out the current conditions in a particular location is easy with tool like [OpenAQ Explorer](#) for air quality data (global, good coverage in Europe, North America, Chile, and India) or [AirNow](#) (United States). To find out about new initiatives and research about air quality, check out the Clean Air Fund's monthly news roundup [via their mailing list](#). And if you—like the typical American—[spend 87% of your time indoors](#), you'll find the [blog](#) published by [Air Support Project](#) interesting; they're a nonprofit that advocates to improve indoor air quality.

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Health. Her research includes evidence synthesis information retrieval and reporting. Kate cofounded the nonprofit organization [Community Access to Ventilation Information](#), which helps public libraries support environmental health literacy and citizen science by lending out air sensors.

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