

# Bush Administration Policies Leave Asthmatics Short of Breath

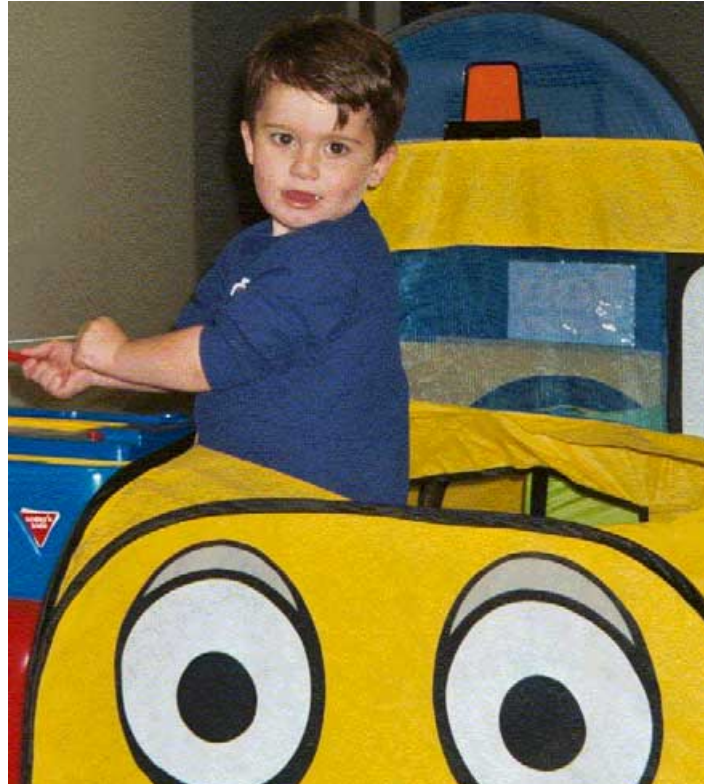
**B**EREL CHUDZINSKI OF PHILADELPHIA BEGAN TO EXPERIENCE WHEEZING AND DIFFICULTY BREATHING WHEN HE WAS LESS THAN A YEAR OLD. ONE EPISODE WAS SO SEVERE THAT HE ENDED UP IN THE HOSPITAL, WHERE HE WAS DIAGNOSED WITH ASTHMA.

Asthma is a chronic disease characterized by inflammation of the airways and lung, which causes wheezing and shortness of breath. Soot and smog from industrial facilities and automobiles can increase the frequency and severity of asthma attacks. Unfortunately, the Bush administration's efforts to weaken clean air protections will lead to more soot and smog in the air, causing asthmatics like Berel to suffer from increased air pollution.

At age 2½, Berel takes medication every day to reduce future attacks, and his parents must keep a watchful eye on their son's breathing for signs of any problems. Andrew Altman, Berel's father, also pays close attention to local air quality in order to protect his son on dangerous, bad air days.

For 15 days during the summer of 2003, smog levels in Philadelphia exceeded recommended safe levels.<sup>1</sup> On poor air quality days, parents of asthmatic children were required to limit the time their children spent outdoors because air pollution aggravates asthma. "There were days when I just didn't take Berel out," explains Andrew.

Berel's family is not alone in its fight against asthma. After talking about their son's condition with friends and neighbors, they discovered that "practically everyone we spoke to had someone in their family with asthma. It was universal," laments Andrew.



According to reports by Pennsylvania school districts during the 2001-2002 school year, nearly 325,000 children in the state were diagnosed with asthma.<sup>2</sup> In Pennsylvania, over 4.5 million people – children, elderly, those with chronic respiratory disease – are at risk from air pollution in counties with ozone monitors.<sup>3</sup>

Asthma has emerged as a national epidemic. From 1980 to 1996 the prevalence of asthma among Americans increased by nearly 74 percent.<sup>4</sup> By 2001, more than 31 million people had been diagnosed with asthma at some point in their lives, and 12 million Americans (including 4.2 million children) had an asthma attack the previous year.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. "Ozone Levels Below Average in 2003." September 26, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> PA Department of Health, Bureau of Community Health Systems, Division of School Health. "School Health Statistics." August 19, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> American Lung Association. 2003 State of the Air, Pennsylvania.

<sup>4</sup> Center for Disease Control. "Surveillance for Asthma-United States 1980-1999." March 29, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> National Center for Health Statistics. "Asthma Prevalence, Health Care Use and Mortality, 2000-2001." January 28, 2003.

# The Bush Administration's Air Policies Will Worsen Asthma Problems

If power plants used the best available pollution control technology to clean up their emissions, the reduced soot levels alone would cut the number of asthma attacks Pennsylvanians suffer by 14,200 each year. Additionally, the number of hospitalizations caused by asthma would decrease by about 37 percent.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, if the Bush administration succeeds in its plans to dismantle clean air protections the number of unhealthy smog days is likely to increase. The Bush administration is weakening clean air programs proven to protect public health; it is letting polluters off the hook, and refusing to require old power plants to install modern pollution control equipment.

Rather than making our air cleaner, the Bush administration's plan will result in more pollution that can aggravate asthma.

## Asthma Does Not Affect Everyone Equally

Children suffer more from air pollution because they spend more time outdoors than adults, and their bodies, lungs and immune systems are still developing. Exposure to pollution at an early age puts children at risk for health problems for the rest of their lives.

Children are not the only demographic suffering a disproportionate burden from asthma. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Blacks are more likely than other racial groups to suffer from asthma, and are more likely to require emergency room visits and hospitalization for the disease.

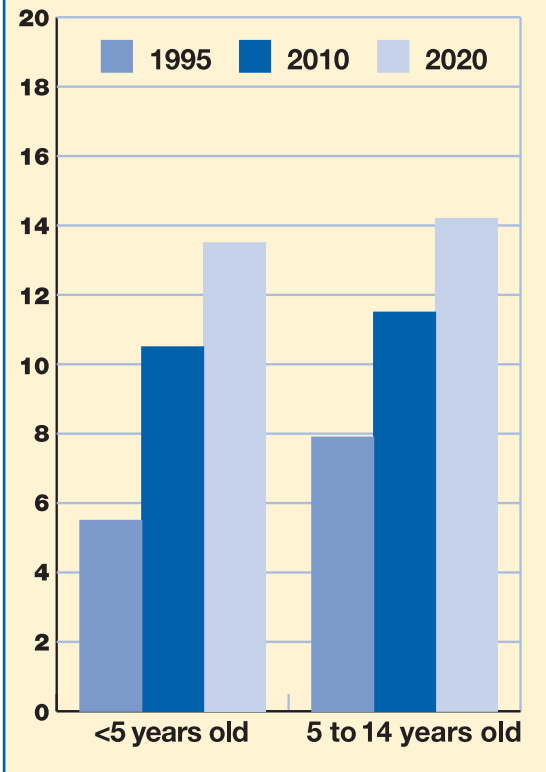
Several recent studies also indicate that Puerto Ricans suffer from asthma at a significantly higher rate than Non-Hispanic Whites and other Hispanic groups. According to one study, Puerto Ricans die from asthma at a rate 270% higher than Non-Hispanic Whites.<sup>7</sup>

Although there is not a single known reason for high asthma rates among minorities, likely causes include lack of access to health care and proximity to industrialized urban areas.

## There Is A Better Way

Thirty years has taught us that clean air laws work. So why is the Bush administration leaving our families and communities at risk? There is a better way. Enforce the law, hold polluters accountable, and require them to use today's technology to protect our health and safety.

### Percentage With Self-Reported Asthma: 1995-2020



Graph: *The Trust for America's Health, 2003.*

**ASTHMA COSTS AMERICANS IN MANY WAYS.**

**IT CAUSES PEOPLE TO MISS WORK AND**

**SCHOOL, LIMITS OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES ON**

**BAD AIR DAYS AND COSTS HUGE AMOUNTS**

**IN HEALTH CARE EXPENSES.**

<sup>6</sup> "The Particulate-Related Health Benefits of Reducing Power Plant Emissions." October, 2002. Abt Associates, Inc.

<sup>7</sup> Homa, DM, Mannino DM, Lara M. Asthma mortality in U.S. Hispanics of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban heritage, 1990-1995. *Am J Respir Crit Care Med.* 2000;161:504-509.

