

Social Benefits of Air Quality: Environmental Policy as Social Policy

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Background

- Air quality is one example of the many ways environmental policy and social policy are related.
- Lower air quality in New York state has proven to disproportionately affect minority populations.
- Economic research shows causal links between air quality and social benefits such as low crime, better funded schools, and higher property values.
- Research also shows links between air quality and increases in life expectancy, education outcomes, and worker productivity.

Research Findings



Health Policy: Relative mortality of those 65+ dropped following changes to local air quality regulations that reduced ambient particulate matter.



Education Policy: Students in schools upwind of a major highway performed better on tests than downwind peers exposed to higher levels of pollution.



Labor Policy: Reductions in ground level ozone increased physical labor output in agricultural workers.



Public Safety: On days when cities were downwind from the nearest highway, there was an increase in violent crime compared to days the city was upwind.

Policy Implications for New York

- Air quality improvements are often expensive, but can carry substantial social and related economic benefits
- Reducing pollution can provide benefits beyond observed mortality and morbidity
 - More productive workforce, both physically and mentally, which may lead to regional economic growth
 - Greater educational performance which may lead to improvements in school rankings
 - Enhanced public safety which may lead to greater public trust, lower policing costs
 - Increased decision-making skills and quick thinking which may benefit workers across a range of sectors