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Proposed EPA Rule Change Met with Concern at Public Hearing in San Francisco

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For Immediate Release

SAN FRANCISCO—Crowds filled the Courtyard Marriott in downtown San Francisco last Wednesday from sunup to sundown, anxious to voice their concerns about the Environmental Protection Agency’s proposed changes to air quality standards. The EPA hosted hearings in three cities on Wednesday—San Francisco, Chicago, and Philadelphia—in order to hear feedback on proposed amendments to the rule for particulate matter standards.

Mono Lake Committee staff and members turned out for the event because the federal changes would significantly affect the air quality in the Mono Basin and the Owens Valley, which are the largest sources of windblown dust pollution in the United States.

“[The Mono Basin] is the wildest and most beautiful land I know... I hope we can ensure that this basin will remain a sanctuary and not a bowl of dust to

poison us.” said Anna Mills, Mono Lake Committee member from Menlo Park, California, who comes to the Mono Basin every year.

Dust storms originate on dry lake bed areas exposed by excessive water diversions by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (DWP). This windblown dust poses a significant human health threat because the dust particle sizes are so small that they pass through the nose and throat to lodge directly in the lungs. The dust also contains toxins such as arsenic, cadmium, nickel, and sulfate salts.

The EPA now wants to eliminate clean air standards for the Mono Basin and Owens Valley—twice! First, the proposal would strip away protections for windblown dust, exactly the kind that blows off the exposed lake beds of Mono and Owens. Second, the proposal would dispose of protections for rural areas, leaving one-third of the US population without *any* air quality standards, including Eastern Sierra communities.

Based on the PM rule changes there would be no protection for citizens living in cities or towns with less than 100,000 people—37% of the US population. The EPA is charged with upholding the interests of the public; however, this amendment unfairly disregards the health of people living in rural areas.

“The EPA hearing officers in San Francisco heard nothing but opposition to changing the regulations. Even the petroleum industry does not want to see a change!” said Frances Spivy-Weber, Co-Executive Director of the Mono Lake Committee.

A working solution is in place to solve these Eastern Sierra air pollution problems and attain the current EPA standards for safe air quality: DWP is allowing Mono Lake to rise and cover the exposed lake bed, while in the Owens Valley they use several dust mitigation techniques on the dry lake bed to keep windblown dust down. Under a new EPA proposal, the standards themselves would dry up and blow away.

There is still time to comment on the proposed EPA rule change for the National Ambient Air Quality Standard Particulate Matter. The deadline for comments is April 17, 2006. For more information on where and to whom you can address your comments, go to the Mono Lake Committee’s website at www.monolake.org.

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The text of this press release may be downloaded from

www.monolake.org/press.

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The Mono Lake Committee is a nonprofit citizens’ group dedicated to protecting and restoring the Mono Basin ecosystem, educating the public about Mono Lake and the impacts on the environment of excessive water use, and promoting cooperative solutions that protect Mono Lake and meet real water needs without transferring environmental problems to other areas.