

Children under Environmental Threat from Administration

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As my daughters begin school this week, I find myself in a state of agonized worry. It is not about how both will fare as a result of switching schools. It is not about whether they will make friends or have nice teachers. It is about the health of their lungs and the quality of their future on this planet. To understand my concern, consider a drawing by two 5-year-olds, a recent scientific study, and a policy nightmare.

Last year my daughter brought home from kindergarten a drawing with six lines of indecipherable text beneath it. I could grasp what the picture depicted. In the center was a blue car with smoke swirling from the back. In so many words, my daughter explained that she and her best friend had drawn a picture about the harm of car pollution.

Here I should explain something about myself and my relationship with my daughter. As someone who was once a pastor for eight years, I have long made an intentional effort to not inundate my daughters with my views of the world out of fear that they will become proverbial Preacher's Kids (PKs) who rebel against everything I espouse. When I shifted from being a church pastor to having a specialized ministry focused on the environment, I was again careful not to "preach" ad nauseam about the environment with my daughters around. The last thing I wanted was to provoke an adverse reaction and raise zealous polluters.

Yet, for the past year, my now six-year-old daughter has consistently amazed me by bringing home her own environmental concerns and even scolding me once for putting produce in a plastic bag at the grocery store. Without my preaching about the environment, she gets it, and she has become a bit of a preacher herself. This brings me to a recent study that investigates the harms children face in simply walking to school. Researchers deployed thermal imaging techniques to find that children are exposed to 30 percent more pollution than adults when walking next to a busy road because their shorter height puts them in closer proximity to exhaust fumes.

Children who are driven to school fare even worse. A car is a virtual toxic-box-on-wheels that exposes children to twice the amount of pollution as their peers on the sidewalk. In considering the import of this research, keep in mind that the developing lungs of children are particularly vulnerable to pollution.

While five-year-olds intuitively understand the dangers faced, adults in the present administration are working hard to dismantle policies that protect the health of children. The administration wants to freeze the Clean Car Standards designed to curb harmful emissions.

Carmakers like Ford have been part of the problem. Despite agreeing to support the Clean Car Standards in 2011, Ford jumped at the opportunity to reverse course by lobbying the current administration. For this reason, people of faith around the country are taking a moral stand by petitioning Ford to stop lobbying for detrimental policies and start advocating for a safer, healthier planet. Our children recognize the dangers, and it's time for adults to accept their responsibility in addressing them.

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