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Urban Sprawl Endangers Public Health New CDC report finds link

In a report released yesterday by Sprawl Watch, the national clearinghouse on best land-use practices, doctors from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found primary links between unmanaged growth and public health.

"We know that sprawl negatively impacts air quality, contributes to traffic congestion and loss of open space, and that it costs a lot more for infrastructure," said Sandy Bahr, Conservation Outreach Director for the Sierra Club's Grand Canyon Chapter. "Now for the first time we can see more closely the inter-relationship between the way our communities develop and our health,"

Creating A Healthy Environment: The Impact of the Built Environment on Public Health compiled data from across disciplines and from multiple sources into a single comprehensive report that examines the effects on health of the broad physical and social environment, which includes housing, urban development, land-use and transportation, industry, and agriculture.

In this report, doctors with the CDC found several primary connections between land use decisions and public health. Their findings include:

- An increase in vehicle miles traveled has resulted in an increase in air pollution and in the incidence of respiratory diseases.
- Sedentary living habits contribute to poor health outcomes because they are a significant factor in the incidence of overweight and obesity.
- Lack of pedestrian friendly features in a community becomes a factor leading to illness and even death.
- Residential development can pose unique health and quality of life hazards.

"This report is a good reminder for public health professionals, urban planners, engineers, architects, business leaders, law-makers and environmentalists to consider healthy land use when making development recommendations or policies for our community. Ensuring a safe and healthy environment should include ensuring healthy land use," said Al Brown, Maricopa County Environmental Services Department Director.

The Sierra Club is one of the country's oldest grassroots conservation organizations with more than 600,000 members nationwide and nearly 13,000 members in Arizona. The Maricopa County Environmental Services Department determines compliance with environmental requirements for new subdivisions. For the complete report, please go to <http://www.sprawlwatch.org>, or call Sandy Bahr at (602) 253-8633 for a pdf version of the report.