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CLEAN AIR, SMALL AREA DATA AND THE URISA PROFESSIONAL

ABSTRACT: The United States, Canada and other nations are seeking to achieve and protect the global environment by improving the earth's air quality through reduction in acid rain, air toxics, pollution from mobile sources, elimination of ozone non-attainment ozone areas. Yet, it is at thousands upon thousands of local levels (neighborhood, cities, regions), where the consequences are realized — the protection of human health, the quality of life, and the local economic consequences. This paper, a continuation of others on the theme of how URISA members can utilize their expertise with small area data to assess and improve the environmental quality of their cities and metropolitan areas, will focus on the subnational analysis of the new U.S. Clean Air Act — how it achieves its objectives and what it may cost in both human and economic terms, at local and regional levels. URISA members must reach out and mesh their capabilities with specialists from both the environmental and public health communities to make the greatest impact.

INTRODUCTION

Last year at this time I reported on the revolution in access to sensitive environmental data bases. This new and rich body of information has evolved since Rachel Carson (the 60's), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, in the 70's), the unfolding health-affecting issues of the 80's (global warming, air toxics, indoor air pollution, asbestos in the schools, groundwater control, acid rain) (1) — and, now, in 1990, the elevation of EPA to a cabinet-level position, a pending Clean Air Act, the creation of a Bureau of Environmental Statistics (reporting to the President), and at least a dozen critical international global warming activities and institutions. (2) There is not only a year of further experience; there is also much more interest in local-level functions and responsibilities relative to the identification of environmental issues, prioritizations of needs and programs, and the effective execution of these programs.