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Press Release

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Study connects Fairbanks hospitalization rates to air quality

Hospital numbers tracked over five years

(Anchorage, AK) — A study published today by the State of Alaska Section of Epidemiology reveals a correlation between an increase in certain hospitalizations and an increase in the concentration of tiny atmospheric particles in the Fairbanks North Star Borough.

The study, based on five years of records from Fairbanks Memorial Hospital, examined 5,718 hospital visits for conditions related to heart disease, stroke and respiratory illness following periods of higher than average amounts of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns, known as PM_{2.5}. PM_{2.5} are produced by combustion from car engines, power plants, and wood stoves. The study revealed that each 10 microgram per cubic meter increase in PM_{2.5} resulted in a:

- 7 percent increased risk for a stroke-related hospital visit for people under age 65;
- 6 percent increased risk for a stroke-related hospital visit for people 65 or older; and
- 6 percent increased risk for a respiratory illness-related hospital visit for people under age 65.

“Basically, this study re-affirms what has already been demonstrated in similar studies performed outside of Alaska,” said Rachel Kossover, the epidemiologist who authored the study. “People with heart and lung problems need to take air-quality warnings seriously and follow the advice of local officials.”

Air quality information for the Fairbanks North Star Borough is available by telephone at 907-459-1312, or online at: <http://www.co.fairbanks.ak.us/airquality/>.

A copy of the study is available at: http://www.epi.alaska.gov/bulletins/docs/b2010_26.pdf

A fact sheet is also available at:

<http://www.epi.alaska.gov/eh/airquality/FairbanksAirQualityStudyFactSheet.pdf>

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