

Bill Number: H.R. 903/S 341

Bill Sponsor: Rep. Thompson, M. (D-CA-4), Sen. Merkley, Jeff (D-OR)

Title of Bill: Smoke and Heat Ready Communities Act

Current Text: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/341/text>

Status:

- Senate
 - January 31, 2025: Read twice and referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.
- House
 - January 31, 2025: Referred to the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and in addition to the Committee on Science Space, and Technology, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.

Summary: This bill authorizes the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to make grants to air pollution control agencies to support the development and implementation of programs that support local communities in detecting, preparing for, communicating with the public about, or mitigating the environmental and public health aspects of wildfire smoke and extreme heat. The EPA must establish a formula to distribute the grants among air pollution control agencies.

The bill requires the EPA to establish four Centers of Excellence for Wildfire Smoke and Extreme Heat at institutions of higher education to research (1) the effects of smoke emissions from wildland fires and extreme heat on public health, and (2) the means by which communities can better respond to impacts from such conditions.

Additionally, the EPA must begin to carry out research to:

- study the health effects of smoke emissions from wildland fires and extreme heat;
- develop and disseminate personal and community-based interventions to reduce exposure to, and health effects of, wildland fire smoke emissions and extreme heat;
- increase the quality of smoke and extreme heat monitoring and prediction tools and techniques; and
- develop implementation and communication strategies.

The EPA must also establish a competitive grant program to assist certain entities (e.g., a state) in developing and implementing collaborative community plans for mitigating the impacts of smoke emissions from wildland fires and extreme heat.

P&A Committee Insights:

This legislation aims to authorize the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to provide grants to support local communities in preparing for, responding to, and mitigating the effects of wildfire smoke and extreme heat. It also calls for the EPA to establish Centers of Excellence for research on the health impacts of smoke and heat, as well as ways communities can enhance their response to these events.

- **Federal Funding:** It would authorize EPA grants for air pollution control agencies to improve air quality and protect against wildfire smoke and extreme heat.
- **Enhanced Research:** The act mandates the creation of "Centers of Excellence" to research the health effects of these hazards and how communities can respond.

- **Community Planning:** A grant program would assist eligible entities in developing and implementing plans to mitigate impacts.
- **Potential to Exacerbate Higher Energy Costs:** Critics argue that the bill could lead to higher energy costs by cutting clean energy and energy efficiency programs, forcing a greater reliance on fossil fuels.
- **Harm to Public Health:** Concerns have been raised that the bill may eliminate pollution reduction programs, potentially leading to increased exposure to harmful air pollutants and adverse health impacts.
- **Public Lands Sell-Off:** Some critics fear the bill could facilitate the sale of public lands to polluting industries, damaging ecosystems and public health.
- **Putting Polluters Above the Law:** The bill has been criticized for potentially allowing oil and gas companies to avoid responsibility for pollution by paying fees, potentially undermining environmental regulations.
- **Threats to the Economy and National Security:** Opponents argue that cutting clean energy tax credits and investments could harm the economy and national security.

Position: Support with additions: Will advocate for the consideration of diverse language needs of communities to ensure effective communication about wildfire smoke and extreme heat risks.

Priority: High

Subject: environmental justice

Bill to Review: Smoke and Heat Ready Communities Act (HR 903/S 341)

Leader of bill:

- House of Representatives: Rep. Mike Thompson (D-CA-4)
- Senate: Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR)

Reviewer: Milagros Rosado Elia

Date: January 2025

Overall Pros	Overall Cons
<p>Offers several potential benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Federal Funding: It would authorize EPA grants for air pollution control agencies to improve air quality and protect against wildfire smoke and extreme heat.• Enhanced Research: The act mandates the creation of "Centers of Excellence" to research the health effects of these hazards and how communities can respond.• Community Planning: A grant program would assist eligible entities in developing and implementing plans to mitigate impacts.• Improved Preparation and Response: The bill aims to enhance communities' ability to detect, prepare for, and communicate about these hazards.• Reduced Health Risks: By providing resources and promoting research, the act seeks to reduce exposure and negative health effects.• Support for Vulnerable Populations: It aims to improve air quality and readiness, potentially benefiting those most susceptible to adverse health effects from pre-existing conditions like asthma and COPD.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential to Exacerbate Higher Energy Costs: Critics argue that the bill could lead to higher energy costs by cutting clean energy and energy efficiency programs, forcing a greater reliance on fossil fuels.• Harm to Public Health: Concerns have been raised that the bill might eliminate pollution reduction programs, leading to increased exposure to harmful air pollutants and negative health impacts.• Public Lands Sell-Off: Some critics fear the bill could facilitate the sale of public lands to polluting industries, damaging ecosystems and public health.• Putting Polluters Above the Law: The bill has been criticized for potentially allowing oil and gas companies to avoid responsibility for pollution by paying fees, potentially undermining environmental regulations.• Threats to the Economy and National Security: Opponents argue that cutting clean energy tax credits and investments could harm the economy and national security.

Language Concerns: The Bills text doesn't specifically detail language requirements for these communication strategies, the general context of related concerns about language accessibility in weather warnings suggests that, if passed, the implementation of this Act would need to consider the diverse language needs of communities to ensure effective communication about wildfire smoke and extreme heat risks.

Reviewer Comments: This legislation aims to authorize the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to provide grants to support local communities in preparing for, responding to, and mitigating the effects of wildfire smoke and extreme heat. It also calls for the EPA to establish Centers of Excellence for research on the health impacts of smoke and heat, and ways communities can improve their response to these events.

Recommendation for NAHN Position (Support, Watch, Oppose): Recommendation is to support this Bill.