

CLEAN AIR AND A LONGER LIFE: STUDY CONFIRMS LINK BETWEEN AIR POLLUTION AND LIFE SPAN -- TO THE TUNE OF 75,000 DEATHS A YEAR IN U.S.

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If you want to live longer -- take a deep breath and move somewhere with open skies and cleaner air.

A landmark study by Harvard University has found that cities which had a decrease in pollution levels saw an increase in the life span of their residents.

An eight-year Harvard followup has found an association between people living longer and cities reducing the amount of fine particulate matter and soot in the air.

"The most important finding from our study is when pollution levels decreased in cities over time, we saw an increase in life span," said lead author, Dr. Francine Laden of Harvard.

The study evaluated the effects of pollution on adults in the 1970s and 1980s. The participants, ages 25 to 74 at enrollment, were followed from 1974 through to 1998.

For every decrease of 1 microgram per cubic metre of particulate matter and soot, there was a 3% reduction in mortality rate. Assuming 2.5 million people die in the U.S. every year, the decreased death rate could save 75,000 lives, Laden said.

"The lower the pollution levels, the better it is. If you decrease the average levels in cities in the U.S. and elsewhere, you will save lives," Laden said.

The followup study consisted of nearly 8,096 Caucasian participants living in Watertown, Mass., Kingston and Harriman, Tenn., St. Louis, Steubenville, Ohio, Portage, Wyncocena, and Pardeeville, Wis., and Topeka, Kan.

Particulate matter is a complex mixture of extremely small particles and liquid droplets that can be directly emitted or can form in the atmosphere from gases such as sulfur dioxide.

Soot comes from combustible sources such as traffic pollution, or

the burning of oil and coal.

The study is published in the *American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine*.