Columbia University in the City of New York, NY

2004 EPA STAR Graduate Fellowship Conference

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# Partitioning the Effects of Weather and Air Pollution on Human Mortality in Santiago, Chile

### INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest challenges in modern epidemiology has been quantifying the impact on human health of prolonged exposure to air pollution. Meanwhile, because of the growing concern over the health consequences of climate change, numerous studies have examined the impact of extreme weather conditions on health. Yet most studies only speculate as to the combined impacts of both weather and air pollution. These impacts are often claimed to be "synergistic" or "interactive", but few studies have measured whether the combined effects are antagonistic, additive, or non-linear.

## STUDY AIM

1.) Identify regional weather patterns associated with poor air quality and elevated cause-specific mortality

2.) Quantify the independent and combined impacts of weather and pollution on human mortality rates.



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> This research is funded by U.S. EPA - Science To Achieve Results (STAR) Program Grant # 91615901-0

Coastal Range 1200 m 1200-1400 m

Santiago 500-700 m Figure 1. Santiago, Chile: Regional topography forms a closed basin, trapping air pollution

Acknowledgements The author thanks Mark Cane, Karen Tomic, Alexey Kaplan, Luis Cifuentes, Ignacio Olaeta, Patricio Aceituno, Tracey Holloway, José Rutllant, and Alla Fil for their help with this study.



Figure 2. Results of the cluster analysis for weather classes. High-mortality classes were determined based on a the density of high-mortality days.

#### RESULTS

NO2 levels were significantly associated with total and respiratory mortality, though the relationship was weaker than that of temperature or dew point with mortality. The effect of extreme weather was strongest at short lag times (zero to three days), while the effect of pollution was strongest at longer lag times (three to six days).



### METHODS

Each day in the study period was assigned to both a weather class and a pollution class using a synoptic temporal classification scheme (Figure 2). Stressful pollution and weather conditions were characterized using descriptive statistics. Forward stepwise multiple regression was used to determine the relative importance of weather and pollution variables in explaining the variation in excess deaths.



## CONCLUSIONS and BROADER IMPACTS

Pollution levels and weather conditions were both significantly associated with the number of excess deaths. The effect of simultaneous extreme weather and elevated levels of pollution on total mortality was approximately equal to their independent effects, indicating that their combined impact is additive, rather than antagonistic or synergistic. Applications of this methodology include improving pollution warnings and weather watch systems and helping to define research priorities with respect the human health impacts of global climate change.

This fellow is sponsored by EPA's STAR or Greater Research Opportunities (GRO) Program.