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Helping to Save the Planet Also Helps to Save Sight

-New EPA Report Estimates Cataract Cases Avoided Through Environmental Protection Efforts-

Tampa, FL (July 30, 2010)– Going green is not just a good idea to protect the environment; it can also help to save sight. The ozone layer is currently compromised, which allows more damaging UV rays to reach the earth's surface. And prolonged exposure to UV rays is believed to lead to the development of cataracts.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) uses the Atmospheric and Health Effects Framework (AHEF) to assess health benefits associated with reducing ozone layer depletion. In the past, the AHEF estimated the impact of changes in UV radiation on skin cancer incidence and mortality. Today, the AHEF now includes the capability to provide results for cataract incidence in the United States. The new report is entitled "Protecting the Ozone Layer Protects Eyesight - A Report on Cataract Incidence in the United States Using the Atmospheric and Health Effects Framework Model."

EPA models avoided cataract incidence as a result of changes to the Montreal Protocol, an international environmental treaty designed to phase out ozone-depleting substances. The EPA report estimates that the strengthening of the original Montreal Protocol through the Montreal Amendments of 1997 will avoid more than 22 million additional cataract cases for Americans born between 1985 and 2100.

There are currently more than 20 million Americans age 40 and older with cataract. And, cataract is the leading cause of blindness around the world. Americans spend \$6.8 billion every year on direct medical costs for outpatient, inpatient and prescription drug services for cataract, according to the 2007 "Economic Impact of Vision Problems: The Toll of Major Adult Eye Disorders, Visual Impairment, and Blindness on the U.S. Economy" study funded by Prevent Blindness America.

"The EPA's report serves as an opportunity for us to educate ourselves on the steps we can take to help protect our vision," said Jay Tobin, President & CEO of Prevent Blindness Florida. "By being vigilant about wearing UV-blocking eye protection in conjunction with a brimmed hat when outdoors, we can help to ensure healthy vision later in life."

This year, Prevent Blindness Florida has joined the EPA in its SunWise campaign. Because the ozone layer is not predicted to heal until after 2065 according to the World Meteorological Organization, SunWise is an important environmental and health

education program that teaches children and their caregivers how to protect themselves from overexposure to the sun.

Prevent Blindness Florida has designated August as Cataract Awareness Month in an effort to educate the public on the disease. Cataract is a clouding of the eye's lens. Over time, old cells in the lens build up and block light as it tries to pass through. More than half of all Americans have cataracts by the time they are 80 years old.

Cataract generally does not cause pain, redness or tears. However, these changes in your vision may be signs of cataract:

- Blurred vision, double vision, ghost images, the sense of a "film" over the eyes
- Lights seem too dim for reading or close-up work, or you are "dazzled" by strong light
- Changing eyeglass prescriptions often. The change may not seem to help your vision.

For free information on cataracts in both English and Spanish, information on how to protect your eyes from UV damage, or for a copy of the EPA's "Protecting the Ozone Layer Protects Eyesight - A Report on Cataract Incidence in the United States Using the Atmospheric and Health Effects Framework Model," call Prevent Blindness Florida at 813-874-2020 or log on to www.preventblindnessflorida.org.

About Prevent Blindness Florida

Prevent Blindness Florida, an affiliate of Prevent Blindness America, is a non-profit organization offering over 50 years of vision education and services. Our focus is promoting a lifetime of healthy vision care through advocacy, research, screening and education. You can help Prevent Blindness Florida by donation when you renew your vehicle registration and driver license. For more information contact us at 813-874-2020 ext. 4020 or visit our website at www.preventblindnessflorida.org.

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