



LET'S TAKE CARE OF OUR SUMMER AIR.
OzoneAware.org

For Immediate Release

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Ground-Level Ozone Pollution Season Begins June 1

Metro residents should be aware of health effects, take action to reduce harmful emissions

DENVER — May 31, 2013 — June 1 marks the official start of ground-level ozone season across the Denver Metro Area and Northern Front Range. Ozone season is a three-month period in which weather conditions are prone to elevate concentrations of ground-level ozone -- an air pollutant resulting from a chemical reaction between emissions factors and heat and sunlight -- to a level that may be unhealthy for some area residents to breathe. The season will last through Aug. 31.

During ozone season, the Regional Air Quality Council (RAQC) -- through its outreach and education program OzoneAware -- issues Ozone Action Alerts to inform metro residents when meteorologists from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) expect weather conditions to lead to potentially unhealthy ozone concentrations. The program also encourages citizens to understand how air quality affects their health and the health of their family members, and to take action to reduce their individual ozone-causing emissions.

Ground-level ozone is a harmful air pollutant that affects all of us -- particularly children and the elderly. Ozone can trigger attacks and symptoms in people with pre-existing health conditions such as asthma or other respiratory diseases and may also affect healthy people who work or exercise outdoors. Ground-level ozone can cause breathing difficulties and eye irritation, as well as a reduced resistance to lung infections and colds. It is likened to a sunburn on the lungs.

Ground-level ozone pollution forms when emissions from gas-powered vehicles and lawn equipment, industrial processes, and even household paints and solvents react with heat and sunlight. The highest ozone levels usually occur in summer months when temperatures approach the high 80s and 90s and the wind is stagnant or light. During the 2012 ozone season, OzoneAware issued high ozone alerts for 38 out of 92 days.

The Denver Metro/North Front Range region fell out of compliance with the federal standard for ozone pollution in 2007 and 2008. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has recently given the Denver Metro Area/North Front Range region until 2015 to meet the 2008 federal standard. Local residents, as well as businesses and industry, can help by making voluntary changes in their behavior to reduce ozone, improve air quality and bring the area back into compliance.

“Ozone pollution is caused in large part by everyday people performing everyday activities,” said Ken Lloyd, executive director of the RAQC. “We can all make a few small changes in our behaviors to improve the quality of our air and, therefore, the health of our families and fellow citizens. Small changes really can make a big difference.”

To encourage area residents to take action to help reduce ozone pollution, OzoneAware asks residents to join its Clean Air Community and pledge certain ozone-reducing behaviors such as driving less, taking transit, and mowing in the evening throughout the summer months. Participants can also use a new online/mobile calculation tool – the OzoMeter – to track their activities, view their air quality impact, and brag to their friends and colleagues about their progress on social media. OzoneAware will hold random prize drawings each week throughout the season, and those who pledge to take action will be entered to win prizes such as bicycles, electric lawn mowers and tickets to events.

Here are some of the actions Denver Metro/Northern Front Range residents can take to reduce ground-level ozone:

- Drive less – walk or ride your bike when you can, group errands, take public transit and carpool whenever possible.
- Mow in the evening after 5 p.m.
- Refuel in the evening after 5 p.m.
- “Stop at the click” – do not overfill gas tanks when refueling.
- Keep vehicles regularly maintained.
- Tighten gas caps after refueling.
- Use electric lawn equipment.
- Avoid solvent-based products; use water-based paint, stain and sealants.
- Make a smart vehicle choice – choose hybrid, electric or more fuel-efficient vehicles when purchasing or renting a car.
- Avoid idling and drive-thru lines – turn off your engine and go inside.
- Sign up for Ozone Action Alerts.
- Take the Clean Air Community Pledge.

Area residents can learn more about ground-level ozone pollution, sign up to receive ozone action alerts, get tips and information about ozone reduction, pledge to the Clean Air Community, and use the OzoMeter to track their ozone impact at www.OzoneAware.org. Residents can also engage with OzoneAware on our social media sites – Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest -- at /OzoneAware.

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About Regional Air Quality Council

The Regional Air Quality Council (RAQC) is the lead air quality planning agency for the seven-county Denver metropolitan area. The Council’s main purpose is to develop plans and programs to keep the region in compliance with federal air quality standards, with significant input from area citizens, business, and local governments. The RAQC also oversees the development and implementation of air quality outreach and education programs throughout the region.