

MAINE PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT NETWORK SYSTEM



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****ADVISORY – Important Information****

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AIR QUALITY ALERT
DEP Warns Maine's Air Quality Worst in Several Years

The Maine Department of Environmental Protection is warning people that the air quality in Maine over the next several days will likely be the worst we have seen in several years.

Ground-level ozone concentrations are expected to reach unhealthy levels along the entire coast of Maine beginning tomorrow (Wednesday). The high levels will continue into Thursday and likely move inland.

In addition to the heat and humidity, several pollutant levels will be on the rise; these factors combined create a more severe situation.

Why is this happening? A large high pressure system has been sitting over the eastern US for days and the air is getting dirtier with each passing day. The result is air quality that will worsen until the system is pushed out and cleaner air moves in. Meanwhile, we have a hurricane expected to move up the coast and a cold front approaching from the west. These weather conditions increase pollution levels and will contribute to poor air quality for the next several days.

At high ozone levels, individuals suffering from a respiratory disease such as asthma, children, and healthy adults who exert themselves can experience reduced lung function and irritation. When this happens, individuals may notice a shortness of breath, coughing, throat irritation, and/or experience an uncomfortable sensation in their chest.

Some actions you can take to protect your health during periods of unhealthy air quality include:

- ◆ Avoid strenuous activity, such as jogging, during this pollution event.
- ◆ Close windows and circulate indoor air with a fan or air conditioner.
- ◆ Avoid using aerosol products such as cleaners, paints, and other lung irritants.
- ◆ Give yourself a break! Take it easy!

Ground level ozone is formed by chemical reactions between nitrogen oxides (NO_x), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and sunlight. Man-made sources of NO_x and VOCs include automobiles, trucks and buses, large combustion and industrial sources such as power generating facilities, consumer products such as paints and cleaners, and gas-powered lawn and garden equipment.

Citizens can take the following actions to help reduce emissions that contribute to the formation of ozone:

- Conserve electricity.
- Choose a cleaner commute, such as carpooling or using public transportation.
- Defer the use of gas-powered lawn and garden equipment until after dusk.
- Limit idling of vehicles.
- Refuel cars and trucks after dusk.
- Combine errands and reduce vehicle trips.
- Use environmentally-friendly paints and cleaning products with low VOC content.

For more information call DEP's toll free ozone hotline at 1-800-223-1196 or visit DEP's air quality web site by going to MaineDEP.com and select 'Maine Air Quality Forecast.'