



News for Immediate Release

July 25, 2012

DEP to Begin Air Quality Forecasting in Eight Additional Areas

Harrisburg – The Department of Environmental Protection announced today it will begin forecasting on Aug. 1 for ozone for eight additional areas across the state, which will help to protect residents who have health concerns that could be worsened by poor air quality.

The new forecast areas are:

- Altoona;
- Erie;
- Johnstown;
- Scranton/Wilkes-Barre;
- State College;
- Williamsport;
- Mercer County; and
- Indiana County.

“This summer’s record heat waves brought the need for increased ozone level surveillance, which will allow for early warning of ozone action days,” DEP Secretary Mike Krancer said. “An expanded air quality forecasting program means residents with health concerns will know to take precautions on particular days.”

Ground level ozone, a key component in smog, forms during warm weather when pollution from power plants, industry, vehicles and households “cooks” in the hot sun, creating breathing difficulty for sensitive people, including young children, the elderly and those with respiratory problems, such as asthma, emphysema and bronchitis.

For days when DEP forecasts unhealthy concentrations of ozone in the air, the agency and its regional air quality partnerships issue Air Quality Action Day alerts using a color-coded scale to represent the level of air pollution. These alerts advise precaution on days with poor air quality and recommend steps residents can take to reduce air pollution.

The ozone forecasts use the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s color-based Air Quality Index (AQI) to provide daily reports on air quality conditions. The AQI colors are designed to assist the general public in understanding air pollution:

- Green means a good AQI in the 0-50 range;
- Yellow means a moderate AQI ranging from 51-100;

- Orange means that the AQI ranging from 101-150 warns of unhealthy pollution levels for sensitive people, such as the very young, the elderly and those with respiratory problems; and
- Red warns of unhealthy pollution levels for everyone, with an AQI ranging from 151-200.

DEP currently forecasts for air quality in five regions across the state. The Lehigh Valley region is Berks, Lehigh and Northampton counties; the Susquehanna Valley region is Cumberland, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon and York counties; the Philadelphia region is Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties; the Pittsburgh region is Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Washington and Westmoreland counties; and the Liberty-Clairton region is the southeastern Allegheny County municipalities of Clairton, Glassport, Liberty, Lincoln and Port Vue.

To sign up to receive air quality forecasts via email, visit www.enviroflash.info. The forecast information will also be available on EPA's Airnow website at <http://www.airnow.gov>.

For more information about the air quality forecasts, visit www.dep.state.pa.us and click "Air," or call 717-787-9495.

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