

ALERT!

October 2004

ALERT is a monthly update on transportation and air quality planning activities in the Delaware Valley.

Particle Pollution Tips

Conserve energy by lowering your home thermostat.

If we use less energy, power plants will not need to burn as much coal or oil.



OZONE ACTION

Ozone Levels in 2004 Average Record Low in Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PennDEP) announced that the state experienced historically low ozone concentrations this summer as unusually cool, damp weather helped to drive down the number of ozone action days from May to mid-September.

PennDEP monitors registered 13 days that exceeded the eight-hour ozone standard, the lowest number in the last 10 years. No state monitors exceeded the old one-hour ozone.

Ozone forecasts are based on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's standardized Air Quality Index, which uses color-codes to represent ozone concentrations (green represents good, yellow means moderate, orange represents unhealthy for sensitive groups and red is unhealthy). Ozone action days are called when ozone levels are expected to exceed 85 parts per billion or reach over 100 in the AQI.

Zero Ozone Action (red) days and eight Ozone Health Watch (orange) days were forecasted this year by the regional Air Quality Partnership, which includes 18 counties in parts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. Last year, 13 days reached the orange ozone levels and two days reached the red ozone levels.

It all adds up to cleaner air

TRANSPORTATION-AIR QUALITY INITIATIVE

Funds Available for Cleaning Up School Buses

Procedures have just been announced for the distribution of \$20 million from a settlement agreement with Toyota Motor Corp. for school bus pollution control. School districts and any other governmental entity that operates school buses are the only eligible applicants.

"Expressions of Interest" are due on Nov. 12. Districts whose expressions of interest are selected (primarily by lottery) will then be asked to complete an application for funding.

The program is dedicating most of its funds to areas that do not meet national air quality standards, which include 38 counties in Pennsylvania. No matching funds are required.

Particulates from diesel exhaust have been associated with cardiopulmonary and respiratory disease; exposure also exacerbates existing respiratory conditions. Children are especially susceptible to these effects.

PennDEP's Bureau of Air Quality encourages Pennsylvania school districts to consider applying even if the district contracts for transportation services by working with their contractor on partnership mechanisms. For a list of eligible counties visit www.epa.gov/ozonedesignations/regions/region3desig.htm.

EPA Releases Particulate Matter Research Report

The US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) recently released report, "Particulate Matter (PM) Research Program: Five Years of Progress." summarizes PM research by EPA scientists, grantees from universities and other U.S. research institutions.

The report represents progress in the Agency's long-term plan to reduce hazardous air emissions through the combination of monitoring, regulation, and research. In 1997, following a number of epidemiological studies, EPA revised the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for PM by setting a new standard for particles smaller than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM2.5 or fine PM). The just released report is part of a federally coordinated effort to define PM health effects. Other federal participants in PM research include the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Energy.

EPA said the research conducted since 1997 confirms earlier findings that exposure to fine particulate matter (PM2.5) air pollution is linked to increases in respiratory health problems, hospitalization for heart or lung disease, and even premature death.

The Agency estimates that these new PM air regulations will prevent tens of thousands of premature deaths and reduce hospitalizations for cardiovascular and respiratory illness by tens of thousands more people each year. The monetary benefits of reducing mortality alone are estimated to be up to approximately \$100 billion per year; the benefits of reducing illness and minimizing the number of lost workdays and consequences of restricted activity are estimated to provide savings of billions more dollars each year.

ALERT contains news items related to air quality and transportation.

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