ALERT! January 2005

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

OZONE ACTION

Study Links Deaths in Many Urban Areas to Increases in Ozone

A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) suggested a correlation between increased ozone levels and premature deaths.

The study, sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), found increases in ozone levels were associated with spikes in the number of non-accidental deaths in 95 urban areas around the country. Many of the deaths, tracked over a 14-year period between 1987 and 2000, were from cardiovascular and respiratory complications.

The study itself was not attempting to decipher whether high ozone levels adversely affected mortality rates but whether increases in ozone levels caused a change in this rate. In other words, the spikes in deaths were not correlated with particularly high or low levels of ozone, but rather with upward changes in ozone.

The increased death rate (correlated with increasing ozone levels) was seen in regions where the ozone is below the recommended safe level (80 parts per billion for an eight-hour period, according to the Environmental Protection Agency), as well as in areas where it is above. Researchers found that an increase of just 10 parts per billion of daily ozone in a week resulted in at least 3,767 premature deaths in the 95 cities.

Pediatricians strengthen warning on air pollution

The nation's leading group of pediatricians, the American Academy of Pediatrics' Committee on Environmental Health, has strengthened its stand on the dangers that air pollution poses to children, and offers new recommendations on how to help solve the problem.

Recent studies have found air pollution not only exacerbates asthma in some children, it can negatively affect lung growth and function and lead to increased cases of respiratory tract illness, premature birth and infant mortality.

The academy's statement appears in the December issue of the group's journal, *Pediatrics*. It updates the previous statement, issued in 1993. The policy statement is meant to inform physicians and also to provide guidance to government officials and other policymakers who are involved in long-range planning to clean up the air.

SAVE THE DATE

Monday, January10th, 2005
Philadelphia Diesel Difference Working Group Meeting

DVRPC Executive Board Room
111 South Independence Mall East
Philadelphia
10a.m. to 12 noon

CONFORMITY

EPA Designates 18 Pennsylvania Counties, Portions of Four Others as Nonattainment for Fine Particulate Matter

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (US EPA) final designations for areas in the Philadelphia-Wilmington metro region not meeting annual health-based air quality standards for fine particulate matter includes nine counties— Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia in Pennsylvania; Burlington, Camden and Gloucester in New Jersey; and New Castle in Delaware. Mercer County was included as part of the New York- Northern New Jersey-Long Island non-attainment area.

Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection (PennDEP) recommended a number of counties placed on this list, however, reservations still remain about the burden placed on portions of the Commonwealth that will struggle to achieve attainment.

2003 Particle Pollution Report Shows Major Improvements in Air Quality

According to an EPA report released on Dec. 14, levels of fine particle pollution were the lowest in 2003 since nationwide monitoring began in 1999. The report looks at recent and long-term trends in air quality and emissions, explores the characteristics of particle pollution in the United States, and takes a close look at particle pollution in 2003 (the most recent year for which data is available).

Since 1999, monitored concentrations of PM2.5 have decreased 10 percent and are about 30 percent lower than EPA estimates of levels 25 years ago. Concentrations of PM10 have declined 7 percent since 1999 and 31 percent since 1988. Monitored levels of both particles decreased most in areas having the highest concentrations.

Airborne particle pollution is a mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets found in the atmosphere. These particles come in many sizes and shapes and can be made up of hundreds of different chemicals. PM2.5 and PM10 refer to the size of the particles. PM 2.5, or "fine particles," refers to particles less than or equal to 2.5 micrometers -- approximately 1/30th the size of the average human hair. These particles can penetrate into the deeper regions of the body's respiratory system. Fine particle exposure has been associated with a number of serious health problems, ranging from the aggravation of asthma and the development of chronic bronchitis to heart arrhythmias, heart attacks and even premature death.

While the Agency's report shows that concentrations of PM have declined, millions of people still live in areas of the country where particle pollution exceed levels established to protect public health. EPA is taking a number of steps to address particle pollution, including the implementation of the Agency's first fine particle standards, the Clean Air Nonroad Diesel Rule, and finalizing the proposed Clean Air Interstate Rule (CAIR).

ALERT contains news items related to air quality and transportation.

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