

ON THE AIR

Summer
2004

A Newsletter about
Clean Air. Provided
by Spokane County
Air Pollution
Control Authority
(SCAPCA)

Summer Air Quality and Ozone

Did you know that Spokane now has some of the highest ground level ozone (a main constituent of smog) levels in the Northwest? Why you ask? There are a few reasons. First, we live in an area with an ample supply of sunshine. Sunshine is a key “ingredient” in the ozone recipe. Second, our inland geographical features tend to reduce the dispersion of pollution. And, thirdly, the human factor: people and businesses. Ozone-forming emissions are released from a variety of everyday activities.

The good news? By tackling the problem now, we stand a good chance of staying within the national, health based standards into the foreseeable future. Your actions can make a difference, read on.

What is ozone and why is it a summer air pollution problem?

Ozone is “good” or “bad” depending on its location in the

atmosphere. In the upper atmosphere, “good” ozone is produced naturally and protects us from UV radiation.

At ground-level, “bad” ozone is a harmful air pollutant. Ground level ozone peaks on hot summer days because of how it is formed: a chemical reaction between nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the presence of sunlight.

Where do VOCs come from?

Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) are emitted to the air from a variety of activities, including:

- Industrial and commercial activities
- Motor vehicle emissions and vehicle refueling
- Lawn mowers and other gas powered equipment
- Household products, such as cleaners, paints, charcoal lighter fluid, etc.



Refuel during evening to reduce the amount of ozone-forming vapors released during the heat of the day.

What's being done to reduce ground-level ozone pollution?

There are a number of strategies in place to reduce emissions that contribute to ozone formation, including:

- Vapor recovery equipment required for storage tank filling at gas stations
- Commercial and industrial emissions controls
- Vehicle emissions check program
- Emissions standards for new engines
- Voluntary and mandated Commute Trip Reduction Programs at worksites

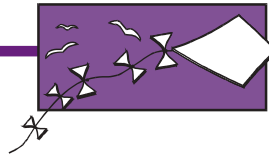
Who's at risk from ozone?

Children are at highest risk because their lungs are still developing. They are more likely to have asthma or other respiratory illnesses, and they are very active outdoors.

Adults with asthma or other respiratory diseases are also at risk. New evidence shows ozone may cause chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases, such as chronic asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema.

Healthy adults can experience a 15-20% reduction in lung function from prolonged exposure to low levels of ozone.

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What should I do when ozone levels rise ?

- Limit strenuous outdoor activity.
- Exercise in the morning, when ozone levels are lower.
- Pay attention to respiratory symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, discomfort. See your doctor if necessary.

How do I find the current pollution levels?

SCAPCA monitors air quality daily, and reports air pollution levels on the Air Quality Information Line, 477-2571, and on the internet at www.scapca.org, click "Air Quality Now." The data is updated every hour.

In addition, the American Lung Association of Washington (ALAW) has a "Breathe Easy Network" (BEN) -- a free email system that notifies subscribers if air pollution levels are forecasted to be moderate to unhealthy. For more information or to sign up, visit www.alaw.org or call the local office at 325-6516.

How can I reduce ozone levels?

- Refuel in the evening. This keeps ozone-forming vapors out of the air during the heat of the day.
- Hold off using gas-powered lawn equipment until evening. Use manual or electric yard and garden tools.
- If you use a charcoal barbecue, start it with an electric probe instead of lighter fluid.
- Reduce car trips by combining errands. Walk, bicycle or ride the bus once a week, instead of driving alone.

It All Adds Up to Cleaner Air!

SCAPCA Launches new web site design

Improvements made to design and navigational features

It was time for a change. Seven years after launching our first-ever agency website, we decided it was time to make some needed improvements, in terms of overall design as well as content management and navigational features.

"People were telling us it was hard to find things," according to Lisa Woodard, SCAPCA Public Information Officer. "We are customer service oriented. A website is one communications tool that we offer to the community, and it needs to be as simple to use as possible." SCAPCA's site logs approximately 125 sessions daily, of the total daily hits of over 400.

SCAPCA hired a local firm to tackle the project. The result: A new-and-improved website where Spokane-area residents and business owners can more easily access critical air quality information and regulations.

Aside from the dramatic new look of the site, there are a number of new features. One new item is a "Featured Topic" section on the homepage. The featured topic will showcase a new air quality related topic every 3-6 weeks.

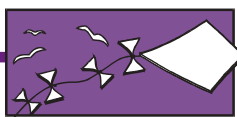
"Most visitors to our site are looking for current air quality data, or they are accessing information and forms related to the business regulatory programs," according to Woodard. "The new site should make finding and viewing this information much easier."

The site still provides information about current burning conditions, regulations, and relevant news, as well as the Clean Air Kids page that serves as an air quality resource for students and teachers.

The website address hasn't changed, it is still www.scapca.org.



Liberty Lake-based Spokane Web Communications, in collaboration with Thinking Cap Communications, developed SCAPCA's website re-design and navigational improvements.



Recreational fires, firepits & other backyard burners

Chimneas, patio warmers, fire pits, and other backyard burning devices are gaining in popularity. Interested consumers are contacting SCAPCA to inquire about the rules for using such devices. These devices are legal to use on your own property, provided you follow the rules summarized below.



Recreational Fires - Defined

Recreational fire means a small fire, limited to cooking fires and campfires, using charcoal, natural gas, propane, or clean, dry, natural firewood, and which occurs in designated areas on public land, or on private property. Recreational fires may be no larger than 3 feet in diameter. Fires for debris disposal are not considered recreational.

Rules to Follow

It's important to follow these rules whenever you have a recreational fire:

- ✓ The only legal fuels to burn are: charcoal, natural gas, propane, manufactured logs/pellets, firewood. Wood must be dry, clean and untreated.
- ✓ The fire can't be used for disposal purposes (i.e. paper, vegetation, yard debris, garbage, etc., cannot be burned.) Burn barrels are prohibited in our state.
- ✓ Burning is prohibited during a burn ban. SCAPCA may ban burning based on poor air quality, and if so, will report it on a 24-hr Burning Information Line (477-4710) and at www.scapca.org. Fire officials may ban burning due to fire danger. Check with your local fire district.



- ✓ The fire may not cause a nuisance to neighbors (excessive smoke and odors traveling onto their property).

Smoke and Your Health

Burning firewood, even legally, can become a concern because the smoke affects you, your family and neighbors. Smoke contains microscopic particles and toxic compounds, such as polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

When inhaled, tiny particles collect in the lungs, causing structural and chemical changes and damaging the alveoli (tiny air sacs where oxygen enters the blood stream). The small particles act as carriers for other toxic or carcinogenic materials. Those at greatest risk from inhaling smoke particles are young children, the elderly, and those with chronic heart and lung diseases.

Things to Keep in Mind

- ✓ Be considerate of your neighbors. Don't burn on days when air quality is deteriorating--usually calm days with little wind.
- ✓ There may be other local rules that apply to your recreational fire, (i.e. homeowner association covenants, rental agreements, fire protection issues, etc.)
- ✓ If you have any further questions regarding this topic, or other air quality topics, contact SCAPCA, 477-4727 or visit our website: www.scapca.org.

The Dirt on Leaf Blowers

Leaf blowers are convenient time savers for professional gardeners, landscapers, maintenance crews, and homeowners. However, using leaf blowers to clean dirt and debris from paved surfaces (sidewalks, driveways, parking areas) creates clouds of dust (fine particles) that are harmful when inhaled.

Give your lungs a break: Ditch the leaf blower. Here's why:

- ✓ Leaf blowers and other 2-stroke engines create as much pollution in one hour as a newer car does driving over 350 miles. While a car will emit that pollution over a long stretch of road, the emissions from a 2-stroke engine are usually concentrated in one area;
- ✓ They kick up more than just leaves. Swirling clouds of debris, including soil or dust, and possibly fragments of pollen or mold spores, pollute our air; and
- ✓ They move dirt and other debris from private property onto public rights-of-way, creating problems for maintenance crews.

Don't Blow It, Remove it.

Clean up dirt and debris effectively and with less impact on the environment. Here are a couple options:

- ✓ Break out the rake, broom, and dustpan. It'll require more work, but you'll actually be removing the material instead of moving it around.
- ✓ Use vacuum-type equipment with dust collection device attachments.

◆ AIR QUALITY CALENDAR ◆

- Aug. 5: SCAPCA Board of Directors meeting for August is cancelled.
- Aug. 14: Kids Day at Riverfront Park. Bring the kids by SCAPCA's booth for fun, hands-on activities.
- Sept. 2: SCAPCA Board of Directors meetings are held the first Thursday of each month, at 9 a.m., unless otherwise publicized. Meetings are held in the lower level, Spokane County Public Works Building, 1026 W. Broadway Ave. Meeting agendas are posted on SCAPCA's website: www.scapca.org.

Chipping and Composting in Deer Park . . .

Chipping and composting were demonstrated as viable methods for handling natural vegetation from residential property at an event held in Deer Park last May.

Area residents who attended the "Community Chipping & Composting Day" could drop off their "clean green" natural debris for chipping and hauling. Ten loads of clean green material were collected at the event.

Composting seminars were presented by volunteer Master Composters. County residents who completed the training received a complimentary compost bin. Bins were distributed to 31 households, courtesy of the Spokane Regional Solid Waste System.

"We hope that the event, as well as future events we're planning to conduct, will result in more people choosing safer alternatives, like composting, to burning debris from their yard area," said Lisa Woodard of SCAPCA.



Over the past several years, opportunities for burning yard and garden debris (natural vegetation generated on improved, maintained portion of residential property) have been phased down by state law. After December 31, 2006, residential yard and garden debris-burning will be banned in all Urban Growth Areas, including Deer Park.

The ban will not affect burning of silvicultural debris from unimproved property, a program administered by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Residents attending the event were provided with Smoky Bear litter bags with information from the event sponsors: DNR, SCAPCA, and the Spokane Regional Solid Waste System.

Deer Park businesses helped support the event by donating space, staff and equipment. Thanks to JR's Feed and Supply, All in One Equipment Rental and Bruce Flock Logging.

Take Note!

On the Air is a quarterly publication of the Spokane County Air Pollution Control Authority. Its purpose is to educate local citizens on all aspects of outdoor air pollution.

Please contact Lisa Woodard, *Editor*, with comments, suggestions or story ideas:
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Information Numbers:

SCAPCA:
 (509) 477-4727

Burning Information:
 (509) 477-4710

Air Quality Index:
 (509) 477-2571



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