

Note to website administrators and editors of internal newsletters for state agencies, schools, and other institutions: Please post this on your internal website or run it in your internal newsletter. Questions? Call MPCA air quality specialist, Cassie McMahon(651-757-2564), or information officer, Sam Brungardt (651-757-2249).

Free Electronic Notification System Can Help You Deal with Bad Air Days

If you are concerned about how air pollution may affect your health or the health of family members or those for whom you care, subscribe to Enviroflash. This free service, provided by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, delivers useful air quality information to your e-mail inbox each day.

The dirty, brownish haze, or smog, that hovers over our cities on some still winter days is a serious matter for at-risk populations. Smog is an accumulation of miniscule, air-borne particles, or particulates, that are the byproduct of combustion activities. Among those who are sensitive to these fine particles are people with cardiovascular or respiratory disease, the elderly, children, and those who participate in activities involving extended or heavy exertion, whether indoors or out. Symptoms may include chest pain, shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing or fatigue. Even individuals who are healthy may experience health effects when pollution levels increase.

The other air pollutant that is of concern is ozone, a pollutant that is formed from vehicular, residential and industrial pollutants on warm, sunny days. Ozone can irritate a person's respiratory system and cause a burning sensation in one's throat and airways. Ozone can reduce lung function; cause tightness in the chest, wheezing or shortness of breath; and aggravate asthma and trigger asthma attacks.

Enviroflash not only gives you daily information about air quality in your community, it also suggests how you can protect your health and help improve air quality by changing your activities. EnviroFlash forecasts are based on the Air Quality Index, the color-coded tool for communicating daily air quality (see <http://aqi.pca.state.mn.us/>).

It is easy to sign up for Enviroflash. Just go to mn.enviroflash.info, fill in your e-mail address and ZIP code, and select the type of message you want to receive. You can sign up to receive daily air quality forecasts, or choose to only be notified when the MPCA issues an air quality alert or advisory.

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