



Keeping Connecticut Healthy

Dear Health Director:

During the warmer months, Connecticut residents can experience as many as 25-30 days when the air is unhealthy to breathe due to elevated concentrations of ground-level ozone (or smog) and/or particulate matter. Many of the days of concern occur from May through September, when temperatures are warmer and when more residents enjoy outdoor activities. *Yet air quality awareness is truly a year-round endeavor.*

To help address these concerns, we write to remind you of some of the services provided by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), in cooperation with the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) that address air quality issues. These resources can be of assistance to you in protecting children and other members of the public from air quality-related health risks, particularly asthma episodes, respiratory distress, and/or increased absenteeism from school.

Air Quality Alert Notification Service

The Air Quality Alert is a free service offered by the Environmental Protection Agency, in coordination with the DEP. This service works to notify local health directors, either by e-mail or fax, when high concentrations of ground-level ozone (the main component of smog) and/or elevated levels of particulate matter are predicted in your area.

Ground-level ozone is an air pollutant that irritates the respiratory system, causing throat irritation, coughing, and/or an uncomfortable sensation in the chest. It can also aggravate asthma; sometimes resulting in asthma attacks requiring medication or a physician's attention. Very small particles in air (referred to as PM or PM_{2.5}) are of particular threat to children, people with respiratory or heart disease, and the elderly. These particles can be deposited deep in the lungs, where they can be trapped, increasing the likelihood of respiratory symptoms in sensitive individuals, aggravating heart and lung disease, and causing premature mortality. When elevated levels of particulate matter or ozone are forecasted, everyone in the affected communities should be advised to take appropriate precautions throughout the day. The Air Quality Alert system provides appropriate precautions based on the day's air quality forecast.

Because children spend so much time outside, they are at a particularly high risk to pollutants. The Air Quality Alert service informs you when unhealthy levels of air pollution may be affecting children and other sensitive populations in your area. It also allows you to advise physical education instructors and/or coaches in your town(s) to consider scheduling less strenuous outdoor activities on predicted high ozone and/or particulate days, or to alert senior centers and/or health care facilities to watch out for increased respiratory distress.

If you are interested in subscribing to this service free-of-charge, please visit <http://www.epa.gov/region01/airquality/smogform.html>.

Specific air quality forecasts for Connecticut also are available from the DEP website at <http://www.dep.state.ct.us/airmonitoring/aqi.asp>

Indoor Air Quality in Schools

Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) problems in schools are a recognized public health issue. Legislation passed in 2003 requires that all schools in Connecticut adopt an IAQ program. The best and most cost effective of these is the EPA's *Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Tools for Schools (TfS)* program. TfS uses a team approach to finding and correcting indoor air problems. In each school building, a group of administrators, parents, school nurses, teachers and custodians investigates and prioritizes potential indoor air hazards. Short and long-term strategies are then developed and put in to place in order to address the identified issues.

TfS has brought a consortium of state agencies and organizations (the CT School Indoor Environment Resource Team) together to develop an outreach and training program in order to assist local school districts in implementing TfS. For assistance in helping your school district(s) adopt TfS, contact DPH at (860) 509-7742.

Diesel Mitigation Plan

With public input, DEP is developing a diesel mitigation plan for submission to the General Assembly by January 15, 2006. In addition, the DEP, in consultation with the DPH, is implementing a long-term strategy to reduce exposure to air pollution, including emissions from diesel buses. One component of this plan, reducing unnecessary idling, provides a cost-effective and easy way to improve air quality and immediately reduce the exposure of people to the potential health impacts of diesel exhaust. Please visit our new diesel page on DEP's website for more information: <http://www.dep.state.ct.us/air2/diesel/>.

In addition, your support of the No-Idling Signage Program in Connecticut public schools has helped build the program to more 500 participating schools in 86 towns and school districts. If you find that public schools in your town(s) or health district have not yet requested signs, please encourage the school administrator(s) to send in the sign request form, found at <http://www.dep.state.ct.us/air2/diesel/docs/signrequest.pdf>

Working Together for a Healthier Connecticut

We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with you and other health professionals as we pursue our common goal of ensuring that students in your town or health district breathe a little easier. Please feel free to share this information with school administrators and other appropriate contacts within your town or health district, such as the school nurse, gym teacher, summer camp staff, and any other faculty/staff or childcare professionals that may take children outside during unhealthy ozone or particulate matter days. Please also consider sharing this information, especially that pertaining to ozone and particulate matter, with senior centers and health care/housing facilities for the ill and elderly.

If you have suggestions on alternative methods of communication that can better serve your needs, please contact Cyndy Redmond at the CT DEP Office of Communications at (860) 424-4100. Thank you for your interest in these matters.

Yours truly,



Gina McCarthy
Commissioner
Department of Environmental Protection



J. Robert Galvin, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner
Department of Public Health