

Air

Dirty

In the past decade, air quality has improved significantly in Southern California. Some of the efforts that have helped our air quality include:

- Cleaner engines,
- Smog Check,
- Vapor recovery nozzles on gasoline dispensers,
- Regulations on solvents contained in painting products,
- Statewide regulation on the amount of solvents in consumer products, and
- Regional air quality control rules that continually reduce the emissions released from more than 26,000 businesses.

Unfortunately, poor air quality is still a real health threat in our region – which covers the urban areas of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties and all of Orange County. If you live or work in this area, chances are you've heard advisories of unhealthful air, seen how pollution masks the beauty of our landscape, or know someone whose health is affected by dirty air.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has designated our region an extreme ground-level ozone non-attainment area. Particularly during the summer smog season we fail to meet air quality health standards and are ranked among the smoggiest areas in the nation.

About 70% of our area's smog problem is caused by vehicles and other mobile sources with internal combustion engines, including trucks, buses, agricultural equipment, construction equipment, and gas-powered lawn and garden equipment. With 15 million residents and 11 million motor vehicles, motorists in the basin drive more than 318 million miles every day. Future growth means more vehicles on our roadways adding pollution to the air we breathe.

New

AIR QUALITY LEVELS

New Air Quality Levels

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has found that ground-level ozone and particulate matter affect people's health at lower levels than previously thought.

Scientific evidence shows that lung damage caused by prolonged exposure to lower levels of ozone air pollution poses the greatest health risk. Averaging ozone levels over eight hours provides a higher level of protection, especially for children and adults who spend a significant amount of time working or playing outdoors - a group that is particularly vulnerable to the effects of ozone.

The standard for airborne particles up to 10 microns in diameter (PM10) remains in effect. But now EPA says smaller particulate air pollution measuring less than 2.5 microns in diameter (PM 2.5) also is a health concern. Breathing fine particle air pollution can cause ill health effects - including premature death and an increase in respiratory illness. The South Coast Air Quality Management District, the regional air pollution control agency, now monitors and provides forecast information for these finer particles.

New *To better protect public health*, in 1999, EPA created the new Air Quality Index (AQI). It replaces the old Pollutant Standards Index (PSI). The most important change is the addition of a subcategory, "Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups." This subcategory was created to provide advisory information to sensitive individuals so they can take action to minimize their exposure to air pollution. The AQI also describes levels of air pollution in the air we breathe. As the amount of pollution in the air increases, so do the AQI numbers. See the AQI on page 3 for detailed cautionary information.