

# Ozone Media Kit

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



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## NEWS STORY

### **OZONE EXPOSURE: WHO'S AT RISK?**

Ask any asthmatic and you're likely to hear about summertime coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and difficulty in breathing normally. The reason? Ozone that forms when pollution cooks in the sun. Ozone aggravates asthma and other respiratory problems — and we're all at risk. Ground-level ozone, even at relatively low levels, can inflame and damage cells in your lungs. Long-term exposure to ozone may have permanent health effects that show up in later years.

Some groups of people are more at risk than others. Children are particularly susceptible to ozone's effects because:

- They are the most likely to engage in vigorous outdoor activity during the hot summer months
- Children are more likely to have asthma or other respiratory illnesses that may be aggravated by ozone exposure
- Their lungs are still developing, so they may be more susceptible to ozone than adults

Asthmatics and people with other chronic lung disease such as emphysema and bronchitis are more severely affected by ground-level ozone, because it aggravates their conditions. These people generally experience effects of ozone earlier and at lower levels than less-sensitive people. Adults engaged in vigorous outdoor activities are also at a higher risk for respiratory problems when ozone levels are elevated.

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Although we can't choose what air we breathe, we can choose to decrease the amount of pollution we put into our air. These small steps can make a big difference in air quality:

- Conserve energy:
  - turn off unnecessary lights and appliances
  - clean air conditioner filters often
  - close blinds during the day
  - turn your air conditioner to a slightly higher setting
  - look for the Energy Star label when buying appliances and electronics
- Don't drive as much
- Keep your car tuned
- Carpool, walk, bicycle, or use public transportation — especially on hot summer days
- Fill your gas tank after sundown when it's cooler
- Be careful not to spill gasoline when filling up your car, lawn mower or other equipment
- Make sure your car's tires are properly inflated and that your wheels are aligned
- Keep household and garden cleaners, chemicals and solvents tightly sealed when you're not using them
- Contact your local electric utility district to find out about energy conservation programs

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## NEWS STORY

### PERSONAL OZONE ACTION PLAN

You know that ground-level ozone is bad. Air quality is so unhealthy in some regions that some people are warned to limit outside activities during days when ozone levels are high.

Our behavior creates ozone air pollution and it's not going away by itself. This is a battle that can be won or lost by individual choices made every day. There are a lot of ways for you to be on the winning side. You *can* make a difference.

There are many sources of air pollution, with the largest contributor varying from region to region. One thing is certain, however: cars contribute huge amounts of pollution wherever you live. Keep this in mind every time you turn the key in the ignition. Ask yourself whether you have to drive. Could you carpool, walk, bicycle or use mass transit? During the summer smog season, less driving means less ground-level ozone air pollution and that's good for everyone.

If you have to drive, reduce the amount of pollution your car generates. Keep your car tuned; make sure the tires are properly inflated; and fill up the gas tank in the evening when it's cooler. Ground-level ozone is not a small problem, but small steps will improve it.

*Here's what you can do:*

- Research the air quality in your neighborhood through your state or local air pollution control agency [www.epa.gov/airnow](http://www.epa.gov/airnow)
- Check out whether your city or state provides air quality forecasts
- Find out what your local government is doing about the problem
- Tell your friends, family and co-workers how they can protect their health by using Air Quality Index (AQI) forecasts

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## NEWS STORY

### **REDUCING SUMMER OZONE AIR POLLUTION IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS**

Ground-level ozone is a powerful irritant that can trigger a variety of health problems — even for healthy people. Chest tightness, coughing and wheezing are common symptoms of short-term exposure to ozone. Unfortunately, repeated exposure to ozone, even at low levels, may cause permanent lung damage. The U.S. EPA has provided these guidelines to help you protect your health this summer and to help you do your part to keep unhealthy ozone from forming.

#### **Health Tips**

Stay informed about air quality in your region. Check the daily Air Quality Index (AQI) in your local paper so you can take precautions when ozone levels are high.

#### **How to Reduce Ozone Air Pollution**

*Make different choices:*

- Conserve energy:
  - turn off unnecessary lights and appliances
  - clean air conditioner filters often
  - close blinds during the day
  - turn your air conditioner to a slightly higher setting
  - look for the Energy Star label when buying appliances and electronics
- Drive less — carpool, ride a bike, walk or use public transportation
- Keep your car tuned
- Keep your tires properly inflated and wheels aligned
- Fill your gas tank after sundown when it's cooler
- Keep household and garden cleaners, chemicals and solvents tightly sealed

*Get the word out to people in your community:*

- Research the air quality in your neighborhood through your state or local air agency
- Check out whether your city or state provides air quality forecasts
- Find out what your local government is doing about air quality problems
- Tell your friends, family and co-workers how they can protect their health by using the AQI
- Participate in your electric utility's energy conservation programs
- Participate in ozone action day programs

#### **When the AQI is forecast to hit above 100 for ozone, you can breathe easier by:**

- Exercising in the morning or later in the evening when pollution levels are usually lower
- Spending less time participating in vigorous outdoor activities
- Taking it a little easier when outside; don't overexert yourself
- Limiting children's prolonged, strenuous outdoor activity
- Asking coaches to rotate players out more frequently
- Paying attention to respiratory symptoms such as coughing, wheezing and discomfort when you take a deep breath

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### AN INDEX MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE DOW

For many people, looking at the Dow in a newspaper is a daily routine. They check out what's happening to protect their financial health. Now, there's an index that you should check out in the daily paper to protect your physical health — the Air Quality Index, or AQI.

The AQI is an easy, color-coded numerical scale that provides information on local air quality. It gives you the information you need to know so you can limit your exposure to air pollution.

When do you need the AQI for ozone? During the long, hot days of summer, when pollution from cars, trucks, buses, factories and many other sources cook in the heat creating ground-level ozone. Ozone can cause serious respiratory problems for people of all ages — even healthy people. Using the AQI forecast helps reduce your health risk.

When the AQI is forecast to hit above 100 for ozone (code orange, red or purple), consider adjusting daily activities so you breathe easier:

- Exercise in the morning or later in the evening when pollution levels are usually lower
- Spend less time participating in vigorous outdoor activities
- Take it a little easier when outside; don't overexert yourself
- Limit children's prolonged, strenuous outdoor activity
- Ask coaches to rotate players out more frequently
- Pay attention to respiratory symptoms such as coughing, wheezing and discomfort when you take a deep breath

Check out the AQI on your local air agency's Web site or in your paper to find out what you're breathing. It's a daily routine that will protect your health.

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### **OZONE MAPPING JOINS THE RANKS WITH DOPPLER RADAR**

Did you know you can watch ozone air pollution in motion? Ozone maps show you a day's worth of pollution much the same way Doppler Radar shows the movement of rain showers.

Created in 36 states with data collected from a vast network of air pollution monitoring sites, the maps show animated movies of ground-level ozone concentrations throughout the day. In just seconds, you can watch the day's ozone levels change from morning lows to high levels in the late afternoon or early evening.

The maps are color-coded to coincide with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index (AQI). "Good" levels, for example, are depicted as green, while "unhealthy" levels are shown as red.

When combined with air quality forecasts, these maps can help you take steps to protect your health and the health of those you care about. Weather service providers, local TV stations and some networks are using ozone maps as part of their daily forecasts during the summer, when ozone levels are at their worst.

It's important to be aware of ozone concentrations in the air you breathe — especially when you consider that the average adult takes about 20,000 breaths each day. Ozone can aggravate asthma and other respiratory problems, and it may pose a health risk for children and adults exerting themselves outdoors for extended periods. Over time, ozone exposure may permanently scar lung tissue, making it more difficult to breathe as you get older.

Ozone maps are available for participating states at EPA's ozone mapping site at [www.epa.gov/airnow](http://www.epa.gov/airnow) and through some local and state air program Web sites. Daily ozone maps are available around 9:00 a.m. with updates occurring every two hours. Forecasts for more than 150 U.S. cities are available after 4 p.m. for most areas.

#### **Ozone Air Pollution Resource Sites**

<http://www.epa.gov/airnow>

- Daily Ozone Forecasts (more than 150 cities)
- Ozone Forecast Maps-Northeast
- Links to State Ozone Forecast Web Sites
- AQI for 36 cities also available daily in USA Today

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