



## Report details 2,000 unhealthy air alerts in 2011

By Elizabeth Weise, USA TODAY, August 10, 2011

You may have thought bad air pollution was on the way out, but not so. A report from the Natural Resources Defense Council counts more than 2,000 code orange alerts in U.S. communities and national parks from Jan. 1 to early August.

Code orange means the air's too unhealthy for people with lung disease, older adults and children. NRDC, a pro-environmental advocacy group, is hoping the Environmental Protection Agency will consider this as they prepare to release new clean air standards.

"Too many Americans are breathing unhealthy air this year," says the NRDC's John Walke. "Orange is the dividing line between whether people play outside or decide to stay indoors that day."

One reason for the high numbers may be the extreme heat waves over much of the country. In 1994, another year with lots of heat waves, it "was a notorious example of a bad air year. I'm betting this year will be a notorious year too," he says.

It's not surprising that the highest number of code orange days are in California, given the large number of vehicles in the greater Los Angeles area. It also means that smog can spill across the mountains around L.A. into some of the deserts. "We don't expect to find pollution there," Walke says.

Some of the numbers included eastern San Bernardino County, with 54 code orange days, Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks with 44, Joshua Tree National Park with 39 and Atlanta with 28. The numbers are based on early EPA raw data obtained by NRDC.

The Air Quality Index is set by EPA based on the concentration of pollutants found in air. There are six color-coded levels: green — good; yellow — moderate; orange — unhealthy for sensitive groups, people with lung disease, seniors and the young; red — unhealthy for everyone; purple — very unhealthy, emergency conditions; maroon — hazardous.

The new numbers come as political rhetoric heats up over new EPA guidelines for allowable ozone levels, expected out soon. When Congress passed the Clean Air Act in 1970 it required the EPA to review the allowable pollutant levels every five years. A new ozone standard was announced in 2008.

However, because it was set at 75 parts per billion and the EPA's outside panel of scientists had recommended a range between 60 and 70 parts per billion, clean air advocacy groups went to court to get it changed. In July, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said the 2008 level was not "legally defensible."

The current level is 84 parts per billion, set in 1997.

The agency has set and missed four dates to announce new standards in the past year.

Even the suggestion that standards might be tightened has been controversial, with some groups saying they could be detrimental to business and the nation's economic recovery.

On Monday, environmental and public health groups, filed suit in the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., to force the EPA to announce the new numbers.

Business groups, including the U.S. Chamber of Congress, the Business Roundtable, the National Association of Manufacturers, American Petroleum Institute, and the American Chemistry Council, have asked the White House to delay the EPA's new ozone standards until 2013.

# Los Angeles Times

EDITORIAL

## Political smog

The White House is caving to pressure and delaying new ozone standards despite a scientific consensus that the minimum standard is too high. Health is too important to allow politics to interfere.

*August 11, 2011*

Former President Bush had a nasty tendency to put politics ahead of science; one of the more flagrant examples of this occurred in 2008, when the Environmental Protection Agency set a weaker standard on ozone, the key ingredient in smog, than the agency's scientific advisory panel had unanimously recommended. President Obama arrived in office the following year promising to rescue us from such dangerous interference. So what is Obama doing about the smog problem? Apparently, putting politics ahead of science.

In January 2010, the EPA announced that it would revisit the Bush administration's decision to set the national ozone standard at 75 parts per billion because reams of evidence showed that such a high concentration would endanger human health. "Using the best science to strengthen these standards is a long-overdue action that will help millions of Americans breathe easier and live healthier," EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson said then. Speaking of long overdue, so is Jackson's revision. The EPA has missed four self-imposed deadlines for issuing new rules on ozone, the latest on July 29.

Why the delay? In December, the EPA said it was seeking more input from its science advisors. The agency received all the input it could need in March, when the panel reaffirmed its Bush-era advice to set the standard between 60 and 70 parts per billion. Clearly, the environmental science hasn't changed; what's different is the political environment. Conservative lawmakers, backed by fossil fuel industry trade groups, are hammering home the message that environmental regulations are slowing job growth. Rather than fighting back, the Obama administration seems to have put the brakes on important new regulations in such areas as coal ash storage, industrial emissions, mountaintop coal mining and ozone.

The result: more human suffering. Smog irritates the lungs, leading to asthma and, in some cases, premature death. Opponents often cite the high cost of tough ozone rules — the EPA estimates that a 60-part-per-billion standard could cost as much as \$90 billion to achieve by 2020 — but never mention their economic benefits in the form of lives saved and medical costs avoided, which the EPA places as high as \$100 billion for the 60-part standard. What polluters don't want the public to know is that if the government cracks down on smog, those emitting the ozone will be handed the bill, rather than those getting sick from it.

Obama could make that case, but he seems to feel it's safer to quietly ignore public health threats during campaign season. From a political standpoint, he might even be right. But tell that to the kids living near places like L.A.'s ports who have to fight for every breath.

## Smog threatens health of the most vulnerable residents

Aug. 10, 2011

Written by

Neil Townsend and Patrick Ryan

Last week Cincinnati experienced its eighth "orange alert" of the season for ozone air pollution, reported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Air Quality Index. The orange alert tells parents and citizens that the air is unhealthy to breathe for children and people with respiratory problems.

If you suffer from asthma or live with someone who does, chances are that you probably experienced first-hand how air pollution affects health and our ability to breathe. In Greater Cincinnati, the more than 200,000 residents who suffer from asthma, including nearly 47,000 children, are particularly at risk. Studies show that on days with elevated levels of ozone pollution, children and adults suffer more asthma attacks, increased respiratory difficulty and reduced lung function.

Power plants and vehicles in Ohio are a big part of the problem. These sources emit tons of nitrogen oxides, one of the main ingredients of ground-level ozone, or "smog." A recent Environment Ohio report described how power plants are one of the biggest culprits in this area and details the problem for Ohioans. The report found that Ohio ranks the fourth worst in the country for smog-forming pollution.

Cars, trucks and buses also emit particle pollution, another key component of air quality. More than 60,000 trucks and 150,000 cars travel daily on some stretches of interstate in Cincinnati. For children and susceptible adults who live near these "hot spots," the air pollution levels may be particularly dangerous. Indeed, studies conducted in Cincinnati have found that children who live near major interstates and bus routes in the region are more likely to wheeze during infancy and throughout their childhood. It is important to note that more than 400,000 people are estimated to live near major roads in the Greater Cincinnati region.

Air quality is an important issue for adults as well because exposure to smog over time permanently damages lung tissue, decreases the ability to breathe normally, and exacerbates chronic diseases like asthma. The National Institute of Health estimates that 5,000 asthma related deaths occur each year. Exposure to particle pollution has also been linked to cardiovascular disease, heart attacks and mortality in susceptible adults and the elderly.

All Ohioans have the right to breathe clean air. The "orange alert" unhealthy air days last week mean that the most vulnerable people in Cincinnati are directly at risk of health problems, and the recent heat wave has only increased the levels of dangerous smog in the area. Unless power plants and vehicles clean up their act, this trend will accelerate in future summers. Climate change is likely to make the smog problem worse.

The biggest polluters should be required to limit dangerous pollution to ensure that kids and families in Cincinnati can breathe easy. We also need Congress doing its part by supporting the Environmental Protection Agency and strong limits on pollution. Sens. Sherrod Brown and Rob Portman, as well as Reps. Steve Chabot and Jean Schmidt, should stand up for Ohioans and support limiting dangerous pollution to protect our health and the health of Ohio's children.



It's our air, but big polluters treat it like they own it. They dump millions of tons of dangerous pollution into our air, threatening the health of all Americans.

Now they're also dumping millions of dollars into a lobbying war against America's clean air laws -- even as millions suffer from asthma attacks and other health impacts, especially the young and the elderly.

By setting stronger air quality standards for smog, the EPA can take a stand against big polluters and their lobbyists -- and stand up for all Americans, including the most vulnerable.

Overwhelming evidence shows that stronger smog standards will save thousands of lives and prevent tens of thousands of respiratory emergencies each year. Why would anyone oppose that?

ADMINISTRATOR JACKSON, WE ARE COUNTING ON YOU TO FIGHT FOR OUR AIR  
SO AMERICA'S MOST VULNERABLE DON'T HAVE TO.

American Academy of Pediatrics  
American Lung Association  
American Public Health Association  
Center for Biological Diversity  
Clean Air Watch  
Earth Day Network  
Earthjustice  
Environment America  
Environmental Defense Fund  
Environmental Health Fund

National Alliance for Drilling Reform NA4DR  
National Latino Coalition on Climate Change  
National Parks Conservation Association  
National Puerto Rican Coalition, Inc.  
National Wildlife Federation  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby  
Physicians for Social Responsibility  
Safe Climate Campaign  
Sierra Club