

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Area Ozone Levels Continue to Improve

As ozone season comes to a close, some may be wondering how the region made it through the hot, sunny, summer days with only a few Air Pollution Advisories for ozone. Area monitors recorded the lowest ozone levels since RAPCA began monitoring for the 8-hr ozone standard in 1996.

For the first time in the region, all six RAPCA area ozone monitors measured attainment with the 8-hr ozone standard. To date, four 8-hour ozone exceedances have taken place over a period of two days during this year's ozone season. Last year RAPCA measured thirteen 8-hr ozone exceedances over seven days.

RAPCA personnel believe there are two important factors leading to the improved air quality

Increased Emissions Controls

Ozone is formed in the air when emissions of nitrogen oxides (NOx) react with volatile organic compounds (VOC) in the presence of strong sunlight, high temperature, and calm air. The majority of NOx emissions come from mobile sources (cars and trucks) and electric generating utility boilers. Mobile sources are also a major source of VOC emissions.

Reduced emissions from coal-fired utility boilers are considered to have been a large factor in the improvement in the air quality data collected during the 2006 ozone season. Thanks to a regional control program on utilities, less nitrogen oxide was emitted by power plants during the ozone season (April through October). This has resulted in lower pollution levels and cleaner air for our region.

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Weather Conditions

Another contributing factor to the low ozone levels witnessed in the Southwest Ohio region this summer may be the weather conditions. Ozone formation requires sunny, clear, days with little winds, and no precipitation. Although the area had high temperatures and little rain, an active storm track across southern Canada helped produce shifting and gusty winds in the region, and many days with scattered or broken cloud coverage.

Ozone Redesignation Likely

As a result of the improved air quality, the Ohio EPA has begun the process to request that USEPA redesignate the Miami Valley from nonattainment to attainment for the 8-hr ozone standard. RAPCA supports this change and will be working closely with Ohio EPA and local planners on this effort over the coming months.

However, while ozone levels have been steadily declining, RAPCA personnel are concerned about growth in emissions that could lead to a set back in air quality. "For the past ten years, we had the E-check program in place to monitor vehicle emissions and a comprehensive permitting program to make sure new industrial sources were well controlled. This past year the Ohio Legislature eliminated the E-Check program and adopted Ohio Senate Bill 265, which reduced control requirements for new industry. RAPCA will be closely monitoring the effects of these two measures. We are concerned these measures may lead to increased air pollution, but we feel the move now to redesignate the area is justifiable", says RAPCA Supervisor, John Paul.

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