



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

BOBBY JINDAL
GOVERNOR

PEGGY M. HATCH
SECRETARY

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Contact: Jean Kelly
Phone: 225-219-3966

Weather, lower standards lead to string of Ozone Action Days

BATON ROUGE – Since the inception of air pollutant standards, Louisiana’s air quality has steadily improved and is currently the best it has ever been. However, the state is continually required to meet more stringent thresholds for pollutants that are set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In 2008, the ozone standard was strengthened from the 1997 standard of 80 parts per billion to 75 parts per billion.

This June, the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality has called seven Ozone Action Days for the Baton Rouge ozone nonattainment area and the New Orleans area and one each for Shreveport and Lake Charles. Of these seven days, there have been five days where monitored air quality exceeded the 2008 ozone of standard of 75 parts per billion in the Baton Rouge area and one each in Shreveport and New Orleans. Although these levels exceed the 2008 standard, they are lower than what we have seen in past years and lower than the 1997 standard of 80 parts per billion.

“Although we have recently seen a string of Ozone Action Days, this does not mean the air quality in the state is getting worse,” said DEQ Secretary Peggy Hatch. “These orange days, or days that are unhealthy for sensitive people, are at much lower ozone levels than we have seen in the past. People need to be aware of these days and take necessary precautions. Also, industry and the public have played a major role in ensuring the state has the best air quality it has had since air standards have been in place. We know everyone will continue to take necessary steps for better air quality.”

Recent weather conditions of dry, sunny days with no wind are conducive to the formation of ozone. Ozone is formed when volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides combine with sunlight and undergo a chemical reaction in the air. June has historically been the highest month for air quality alerts in Louisiana. Record temperatures across the southeastern United States have led to an increase in both action and exceedance days for many states.

While weather conditions are an important factor in ozone formation, individual and corporate actions can have a profound effect on air quality. The individual citizen can do much to help prevent ozone formation: using lawn equipment and fueling vehicles after 6 p.m., conserving energy in their homes, keeping vehicle idling to a minimum, going into the bank or restaurant instead of using the drive-thru window, carpooling and bringing their lunch to work are all things that help keep the emissions out of our air. Industrial facilities have developed ozone action plans, which they put into place when Ozone Action Days are predicted. This year, industry is being notified at a lower threshold than usual so they can take actions sooner to prevent ozone formation.

In order to take such preventative actions, everyone must be aware of the air quality forecast and be familiar with the Air Quality Index. Signing up for the EnviroFlash automatic notification system will allow the public to receive emails or texts concerning air quality and Ozone Action Days. It is important for the protection of health to have current information. Signing up for EnviroFlash is both free and easy. Just go to www.deq.louisiana.gov/enviroflash and pick the area of the state that concerns you.

It is important to note that air quality controls that were put into place to meet the 1997 ozone standard are working. Based on DEQ monitoring data demonstrating that the Baton Rouge area meets the standard, the area is poised to be recognized by EPA this summer and redesignated as “attainment”. These same control rules are helping to keep the number of actual exceedance days to a minimum. Because EPA has wrestled with exactly where to set the revised ozone standard, this has kept states like Louisiana from setting emissions rules for the 2008 standard of 75 parts per billion. EPA is scheduled to announce the final standard later this summer.

For current air quality information, go to www.deq.louisiana.gov.