



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Increase in Code Orange and Code Red Air Quality Days Expected Throughout Region
Change in ground-level ozone standard means more awareness, action needed by residents

April 28, 2008 (Washington, D.C.) – The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) National Air Quality Awareness Week kicks off today with the news that an increase in the number of Code Orange and Code Red air quality days is expected in the metropolitan Washington-Baltimore region this ozone season. The expected increase is the result of EPA's recent changes in the national air quality standard for ground-level ozone which can cause respiratory problems and other health effects. The new standard lowers the Code Orange and above range on the Air Quality Index (AQI), EPA's color-coded tool for communicating daily air quality, in order to better protect public health. The change in the AQI is attributed to new research that finds there are greater health risks when exposed to lower levels of ground-level ozone than previously thought.

According to Clean Air Partners, a regional partnership committed to improving air quality and protecting public health throughout the metropolitan Washington-Baltimore region, the number of Code Orange days (days that surpass the national standard level for safe or healthy air quality) will likely double this season. This increase will require residents to take action more frequently in order to reduce air pollution and protect the health of area residents.

"Although we have seen an improvement in the air quality throughout our region, EPA's new standard demonstrates that ground-level ozone at lower levels is harmful to our residents' health, especially sensitive groups," said Joan Rohlf, Chief of Air Quality Planning for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and Program Manager for Clean Air Partners. "With the expected increase in Code Orange and Red days, residents will be called upon to do their part to help improve air quality and stay healthy. We view this tightening of standards as an opportunity for the region to further improve the air that we breathe."

More than 4 million people in the metropolitan Washington-Baltimore region live in areas that exceed EPA's standards for ground-level ozone and particle pollution. Sensitive groups, made up of 1.5 million area residents, are people with lung disease (asthma, emphysema, and chronic bronchitis), children, older adults, and people who are active outdoors and who may experience adverse health effects when air pollution levels are elevated for a prolonged period of time. EPA and Clean Air Partners recommend that during a Code Orange or above day, sensitive groups should limit their outdoor activity level and everyone should follow actions to reduce air pollution. Recommended actions include driving less by postponing errands, teleworking, carpooling or taking public transit, refueling after dark, and postponing mowing, all of which will impact air quality, improve health and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that impact climate change.

Despite the new standard, the air quality in the metropolitan Washington-Baltimore region has improved over the past decade. This is due in part to federal, state and local government regulations and pollution control programs, continuous public education and outreach on air quality, as well as increased voluntary efforts taken by participants and members of the Clean Air Partners program. There is also evidence that overall public awareness of air quality has increased. Today, more than 60 percent of the public is familiar with the AQI compared to only 45 percent in 1996. Since launching in May of 2007, there have been over 4 million visits to the Clean Air Partners website which supplies information about regional air quality. Additionally, more than 1,200 individuals have registered to receive Clean Air Partners' AirAlerts, daily air quality forecasts and real time health notifications, which provide timely air quality information, helping residents to protect their health.

EPA estimates that the new standards will yield health benefits valued between \$2 billion and \$19 billion. Those benefits include preventing cases of bronchitis, aggravated asthma, hospital and emergency room visits, nonfatal heart attacks and premature death, among others.

For more information about local efforts to improve air quality and, sign up to receive daily AirAlerts, or view the Air Quality Action Guide, visit www.cleanairpartners.net.

ABOUT CLEAN AIR PARTNERS

Clean Air Partners is a non-profit, public-private partnership committed to improving the health and the quality of life of residents in the metropolitan Washington-Baltimore region for more than 10 years. Clean Air Partners educates the public about the health effects of poor air quality and encourages the public to take voluntary actions to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions which contribute to climate change. More than 1,200 individuals and organizations are registered as Clean Air Partner participants and members and have committed to take voluntary actions on poor air quality days.

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