

I'm speaking this morning as the Chairman of the Metropolitan Washington Area Air Quality Committee or MWAQC.

MWAQC is the regional coordinating body that works through the Council of Governments to advance regional compliance with the Clean Air Act.

What we have here is a classic case of "Is the glass half full or half empty?"

Is our air getting cleaner? The answer is an emphatic YES!

Is there still more work to be done? Again, an emphatic YES – and the region and our state partners remain committed to going beyond mere compliance.

Let's look at the facts:

Emissions causing ozone have been significantly reduced.

- Nitrogen Oxides or NOX (what's found in vehicle exhaust and power plant emissions) have decreased by over 40% between 1990 and 2004 – Despite a population growth of 23%!
- During this same period, volatile organic compounds or VOC (the fumes from chemical solvents, paints and gas cans) were also reduced by more than 40%

The real impact of these successes for the people of our region is that over the past 5 ozone seasons, the number of days when ozone levels exceed EPA standards and force alerts has dropped to only 2 to three days each summer.

Why is our air getting cleaner?

Quite simply this, the Federal, State and local measures implemented since 1990 are working. Also, for us in Washington, our member jurisdictions are literally competing with one another to do better.

Rather than focusing only on "region wide requirements," we've wedded local voluntary commitments to our overall efforts.

For example, Fairfax County is one of the first jurisdictions in the region to commit to wind energy as an alternative power source.

We've also made serious commitments to hybrid fueled vehicles and are actively promoting pedestrian and bicycle friendly roads and development.

So where do we go from here?

- We need more regulatory "teeth" to deal with "transported" pollution from power plants and other uses upwind of the Washington region. You've got to realize that these seemingly "far off" sources are the cause of as much as 50 to 70% of the pollution on our worst air quality days.
- We also need to work together to respond to the new fine particulate standards and the challenges of population growth in a vibrant region.

Again, don't lose sight of the truth that when it comes to regional air quality the glass is really half full!