

METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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MWAQC Credits Clean Air Act, Regional Cooperation for Better Air
Regional board acknowledges legislation's 40th anniversary

Washington, D.C. – Despite 2010 being the hottest summer in its history, the metropolitan Washington region's air quality continues to improve. Much of that improvement can be attributed to two primary factors – the passage of the Clean Air Act in 1970 (and its subsequent Amendments in 1990) and the decision by local governments in the region to work together to improve the region's air quality.

This year marks the 40th anniversary since the Clean Air Act was enacted. Leta Mach, Chair of Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee (MWAQC) and City of Greenbelt Councilmember remarked on legislation's achievements. "The country and the region have made tremendous progress reducing air pollution and saving lives," Mach said. "Forty years after the enactment of the Clean Air Act and twenty years after MWAQC was formed, we are reaping the benefits of these actions."

According to the EPA, the initial Clean Air Act prevented hundreds of thousands of deaths, millions of illnesses, and many other harmful consequences associated with air pollution. The Clean Air Act was amended in 1990, strengthening the air quality and health requirements in the legislation. The Amendments have had myriad positive impacts, just some of which include:

- Nearly the entire country is meeting air quality targets set years ago for carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and sulfur dioxide.
- Lead levels in ambient air are 92% lower than in 1980, greatly reducing the number of children with IQs below 70 as a result of air pollution.
- Preliminary EPA analysis shows that the economic value of the air quality improvements is estimated to reach almost \$2 trillion for the year 2020, a value which vastly exceeds the costs of efforts to comply with the 1990 Clean Air Act and related programs.

Following the 1990 Amendments, MWAQC was formed to prepare an air quality plan for the region and oversee its implementation because air pollution is an issue that crosses jurisdictional and state boundaries.

From May to mid-September 2010, there were 54 days when temperatures were above 90 degrees. Ten years ago, that would have meant 54 days of bad air. However, reduced emissions thanks to the Clean Air Act and the region's air quality plans, there were only three days where air quality was unhealthy for all area residents (Code Red), while there were 30 days where the air was unhealthy for sensitive groups, such as children or the elderly (Code Orange). "The 2010 numbers are up from last year's low figures, but the overall trajectory of the region's air quality remains positive," Mach noted.

MWAQC, which is staffed by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG), coordinates air quality planning activities among COG, external committees, and the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB).

COG is the association of 21 local governments working together for a better metropolitan region.

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