

Clean Air Milestone: Data Indicates D.C. Region Now Meets Clean Air Act Standard

Draft data released today by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) showed continued air quality improvement and indicated that the region will now meet federal standards for ground-level ozone, a colorless gas created when air pollutants react on hot, sunny summer days.

COG staff told area officials that the region recorded just five days in 2015 when the region's air quality exceeded healthy levels for ground-level ozone. In 1998, there were 67 such days. Staff also pointed out that none of this year's exceedance days reached Code Red unhealthy levels for a third straight summer.

[Click here](#) for the complete ozone season presentation.

"Meeting the ozone standard is a major achievement that will protect the health of our region's residents including those that are most sensitive, such as older adults, people with respiratory conditions, and children, by reducing the effects of air pollution on people's breathing. It is a testament to more than a decade of actions at the federal, state, and local government levels," said City of Falls Church Vice Mayor David Snyder, who serves as Chairman of the Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee (MWAQC) at COG. Some of these actions include new regulations to reduce emissions from power plants, passenger vehicles, and programs to improve energy efficiency and renewable energy use.

"While today we celebrate our progress, we must also commit to additional improvement in order to ensure the health and quality of life for our region's residents," said Snyder.

High concentrations of ground-level ozone can cause shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing, fatigue, headaches, nausea, chest pain, and eye and throat irritation, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently considering more stringent standards to control this pollutant. Local and state leaders on MWAQC have been supportive of more stringent standards to further protect public health.

The region is currently designated as being in marginal non-attainment of the federal standard for controlling ground-level ozone. The new draft data released today showed that the region has a three-year "design value" (the measure of compliance with the federal standard) of 70 parts per billion of ground-level ozone. When finalized by the EPA, this will show the region is in attainment of the standard.

Meeting the ozone standard would follow last year's regional air quality achievement regarding another pollutant—fine particles—a mixture of microscopic pollutants that can cause respiratory and cardiovascular problems. In 2014, EPA approved redesignating the region as in compliance with its fine particle pollution standard.

The Metropolitan Washington Air Quality Committee, which is staffed by COG, coordinates air quality planning in the region. Its members include area elected officials, environmental directors, and state air management and transportation officials.

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