

NEWS RELEASE

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West Michigan Ozone Action Program to Become Clean Air Action Program with Addition of New Pollutant

MUSKEGON, MI – West Michigan residents won't hear about Ozone Action Days this summer; instead, they'll be informed about Clean Air Action Days and another pollutant—particulate matter—as early as this winter.

The new **Clean Air Action** program, which will officially launch on **January 26** and replace the Ozone Action program, includes a public education campaign for ground-level ozone pollution *and* particulate matter. It will also include Clean Air Action Day notifications when either pollutant is expected to reach levels that are unhealthy for sensitive groups (USG). Because particulate matter can reach the USG range during any season, **this program will be year-round.**

This will be a significant change for local residents who are accustomed to the former Ozone Action program that was active only during the spring and summer months. This was due to the fact that ozone—a highly reactive gas consisting of three oxygen atoms and the main ingredient in smog—relies on sunlight and heat to form. Unlike ozone, particulate matter—a term for a mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets found in the air—exists irregardless of seasonal weather conditions. It can come from direct sources, such as construction sites or fires, or form in complicated reactions in the atmosphere between certain chemicals emitted from power plants, industries and automobiles. Therefore, particulate matter is a year-round pollutant.

Just like on previous Ozone Action Days, on Clean Air Action Days, West Michigan residents will be asked to take certain voluntary actions to protect their health or reduce emissions. These voluntary actions may include limiting physical activity for health reasons, or carpooling, taking mass transit, delaying lawn mowing (summer only), and using clean burning techniques to reduce emissions.

The reasons for expanding the program are many. Due to its extremely small size, particulate matter is easily inhaled into the lungs, where it can cause a host of physical symptoms ranging from shortness of breath to nonfatal heart attacks. Particulate matter is also known to cause environmental and aesthetic

damage by acidifying lakes and streams and staining stone, including statues and monuments. Lastly, a nonattainment designation can be costly, as it limits the ability of new businesses to come to the area and can result in the enforcement of costly emission control measures. Relaunching the program to include particulate matter will allow the public to protect their health on days when pollution levels are high, be informed about air quality year-round, and take part in emission reduction activities to improve air quality in West Michigan.

Through this endeavor, West Michigan is joining with several neighboring states that have also expanded their air quality programs to include ozone and particulate matter. As of January 2009, the West Michigan Clean Air Action program is the only two-pollutant air quality program in Michigan.

West Michigan residents can stay informed about air quality year-round by calling the West Michigan Clean Air Action hotline: 1-800-656-0663, signing up to receive e-mail or text message notifications about air quality from Enviroflash at www.enviroflash.info, or visiting www.deqmiair.org.

The Clean Air Action program will be run by the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition, a partnership of business, education, government, and nonprofit groups working together to achieve cleaner air in the region through the education and promotion of voluntary emission reduction activities. The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) provides staff to coordinate the Clean Air Action program in Muskegon and northern Ottawa County. For more information about the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition, please visit www.wmcac.org.

WMSRDC is a federal and state designated regional planning and development agency serving 127 local governments in Lake, Mason, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, and northern Ottawa Counties. For more information on WMSRDC, go to www.wmsrdc.org.

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