



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

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Contact: Tom Mather
Phone: (919) 715-7408

AIR QUALITY OFFICIALS ISSUE CODE ORANGE HEALTH NOTICE

RALEIGH – Air quality officials issued a health notice today for air pollution in the Charlotte, Fayetteville and Triangle metropolitan areas on Saturday. Forecasters have predicted Code Orange conditions, which means that air quality in these areas is likely to be unhealthy for sensitive groups.

The Code Orange forecast means people who are sensitive to air pollution should avoid moderate exertion outdoors. Sensitive groups include children and the elderly who are active outside, people who work or exercise outdoors, and those with heart conditions and respiratory ailments such as asthma, bronchitis and emphysema.

In Charlotte and the Triangle, the primary pollutant of concern is ozone, a highly reactive form of oxygen. Ozone can be unhealthy to breathe, damage plants and reduce crop yields. High ozone levels generally occur in the afternoons on hot sunny days with stagnant air, when pollutants such as nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons react in the lower atmosphere.

In Fayetteville and southeastern North Carolina, the primary pollutant of concern is fine particles from wildfires burning near Myrtle Beach, S.C. Particle pollution is unhealthy to breathe, particularly for those with heart conditions or respiratory ailments. People in areas with visible smoke should avoid strenuous outdoor activities throughout the day.

The air pollution forecast for Saturday predicts that ozone levels will exceed the new federal standard of 0.075 parts per million (ppm) averaged over 8 hours in Charlotte and the Triangle. High ozone levels can impair breathing and aggravate symptoms in people with respiratory problems, and irritate the lungs in healthy individuals. People with chronic lung ailments, the elderly and children should reduce physical exertion and outdoor activity in the afternoon, when ozone levels are highest. High particle levels could be present throughout the day in areas where there is smoke from wildfires.

The N.C. Division of Air Quality issues daily air forecasts for the Triangle, Charlotte, Asheville, Hickory, Fayetteville and Rocky Mount metropolitan areas. In the Triad, forecasts are issued by the Forsyth County Environmental Affairs Department. The forecasts are part of the N.C. Air Awareness Program, a voluntary effort aimed at reducing air pollution in the state's major metro areas. As part of this program, air quality officials are asking residents of Wake, Mecklenburg, Buncombe, Catawba, Cumberland, Forsyth, Nash, Edgecombe and surrounding counties to help reduce air pollution by taking some of the following actions:

- Limit driving by riding the bus, walking, bicycling or postponing trips.
- If you drive, avoid idling for long periods of time, stay within speed limits, combine errands to reduce the number of small trips, and use vehicles with higher fuel economies.
- Conserve electricity by setting thermostats at the highest comfortable temperature and turning off appliances that are not in use.

In addition, residents of affected areas should refrain from outdoor burning on Code Orange and Red days. It is always illegal to burn paper, trash, construction materials and other non-vegetative matter in North Carolina.

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N.C. Division of Air Quality
Keith Overcash, Director
1641 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1641

Tom Mather, Public Information Officer
(919) 715-7408, FAX (919) 715-7175

tom.mather@ncmail.net

The DAQ estimates that more than half of North Carolina's citizens live in counties where ozone levels exceed the standard during warmer months. In 1999, the N.C. General Assembly passed legislation aimed at reducing ozone-forming emissions from cars and trucks, including an expansion of the motor vehicle emissions inspection program from nine to 48 counties. In 2002, the General Assembly enacted legislation that will require the state's coal-fired power plants to reduce their ozone- and haze-forming emissions by three-fourths over the next decade.

For additional information about air quality forecasts, open burning restrictions and other air issues, visit the DAQ web site at www.ncair.org or call 1-888-RU4NCAIR (1-888-784-6224). Information about air quality in the Triad can be found at Forsyth County's web site, <http://www.co.forsyth.nc.us/EnvAffairs/>

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