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Contact: Margaret LaCroix
American Lung Association of New England
Phone: (860) 289-5401
E-Mail: mlacroix@lungct.org

American Lung Association of New England Says Stronger Air Quality Standards Urgently Needed

Healthy Air Initiative Launched As Summer Begins

To protect the public from the “invisible menace” of ozone poisoning this summer, the American Lung Association of New England (ALANE) is calling for more stringent air quality standards. Today, the organization announced that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) guidelines released earlier this spring will not adequately safeguard public health.

Last year, New England recorded 54 days of high ozone levels according to EPA standards. If the recommended tighter standards had been in place, a staggering 98 days would have qualified as unhealthy.

“The public is not being protected adequately by current air standards,” said Jeff Seyler, CEO of ALANE, “The EPA went against its own scientists in setting standards. Current measures fall short of what is necessary to ensure public safety.”

EPA health-based air quality standards were revised this spring. In a unanimous decision, the EPA’s own Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee (CASAC) recommended that the standard be lowered to within a range between 70 and 60 parts per billion (ppb). Instead, the EPA reduced the standard from the current 84 ppb to only 75 ppb. “The public is being led to believe that the air they are breathing is healthy,” said Seyler, “Unfortunately, research shows that this is not the case.”

(more)

The New England region is particularly susceptible to unhealthy air and the health effects of ozone pollution. In fact, New England posts the highest asthma rates in the country. Today's call for stricter standards stems from the organization's new Healthy Air Initiative. Following successful efforts against tuberculosis and tobacco, the Healthy Air Initiative is the American Lung Association's third major public health intervention in the organization's 100 year history.

"Indoor and outdoor air pollution is emerging as a more dangerous health threat than what we once thought," said Seyler. "In particular, we're realizing that ozone is more harmful to everyone than we previously believed."

Ground-level ozone is formed when pollutants emitted by cars and fossil fuel burning power plants, industrial boilers, refineries and other sources react chemically with sunlight. Ozone pollution is dangerous to people suffering from respiratory diseases including asthma and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). However, even healthy adults and children can be at risk during high ozone days. Studies show that repeated exposure to ozone pollution may cause permanent structural damage to the lungs, and can even contribute to premature death. Symptoms of ozone poisoning include shortness of breath, coughing, nose and throat irritation.

The ALANE recommends that people limit outdoor activity during unhealthy days. Reducing strenuous exercise, or exercising in the early morning or evening, can reduce exposure to ozone. People can sign up for unhealthy air alerts at www.OwnYourAir.org.

As part of the Healthy Air Initiative, ALANE is urging people to take simple steps to reduce pollutants. "We often blame states west of us for our air pollution, yet in a typical New England state such as Connecticut, 40% of the pollution is caused by automobiles and other local sources," said Seyler. Steps the public can take to reduce pollution include using public transportation, carpooling, and using less energy by turning off lights and electronic equipment when not in use. Other energy-saving measures can also be found at www.OwnYourAir.org.

The ALANE is part of the American Lung Association, the oldest voluntary health organization in the U.S. The mission is to prevent lung disease and promote lung health.

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