

]Smog Season Safety Tips: Enjoy the Outdoors While Reducing Exposure to Harmful Pollution

May in metro Atlanta means beautiful weather, athletics tournaments, graduation, filling swimming pools – and the start of smog season, which runs from May 1 to September 30. Ground-level ozone only forms during these hot conditions and concentrations of fine particulate matter (PM) also tend to be higher during the summer months.

All children are particularly sensitive to the effects of air pollution because they take in more air per body weight, their lungs are still developing and they tend to spend more active outdoor time than adults. Along with adults who suffer from respiratory or cardiac diseases and the elderly, children are more vulnerable to the negative health effects of air pollution and caregivers must monitor pollution levels and consider the risks before sending them outdoors on smog alert days.

While the primary goal of Mothers & Others for Clean Air, a program housed at the Georgia Conservancy, is to improve Georgia's air quality and eventually eliminate the need for smog alerts, the group also educates the public about necessary precautions to take to reduce exposure. As a result, Mothers & Others for Clean Air has been leading a team of health and air quality professionals in updating a comprehensive guidance document for modifying outdoor activity on smog alert days. These guidelines are now available at www.mothersandothersforcleanair.org.

What are smog alerts?

A measure called the Air Quality Index (AQI) rates air pollution levels on a scale from zero (the cleanest) to 500 (the most polluted). The AQI recently was adjusted due to the strengthening of the federal standard for ozone in March 2008. As a result, smog alerts this year will be more frequent to better reflect what scientists believe to be unhealthy concentrations of ozone.

The Georgia Environmental Protection Division (EPD) issues smog alerts whenever the AQI is predicted to exceed 100. With an orange smog alert, the air is considered to be unhealthy to breathe for sensitive populations, which includes all children. A red smog alert means that the air is unhealthy for everyone.

How can I receive smog alerts?

The easiest way to receive smog alerts is either to register for email notification with the Clean Air Campaign at http://www.cleanaircampaign.com/tools/sign_up_form or contact Georgia EPD's Air Quality Hotline at 404-362-4909. These services forecast which pollutants are likely to be high the following day.

What adjustments are necessary on orange and red days?

One way to respond is to limit outdoor activity on orange days and eliminate all outdoor activity on red days. Paying attention to the type of pollutant that is high can help with planning some outdoor activity even on smog alert days.

The smog alerts by phone or email indicate whether ozone, particulate matter (PM) or both are at unhealthy levels. Different pollutants peak at different times of the day. For ozone, levels are highest from 2-7 p.m., so plan outdoor activities for the morning or late evening. For PM, the peaks occur right around morning and evening rush hour, so moving exercise times to the middle

of the day will help avoid the highest concentrations of this pollutant. If both ozone and PM are high, it is best to move all exercise indoors that day. Consider working out indoors and finding an indoor play space for children. Decatur Recreation Center, for example, offers gymnasium space for play groups and is available for reservations.

By paying attention to the alerts and the kind of pollutant that is high and by adjusting activities accordingly, it is still possible to get plenty of exercise while also avoiding air pollution that poses serious health risks, especially for children, those with chronic heart or lung disease and the elderly.

What about my child's school and summer camps—will they take appropriate precautions?

Unfortunately, not all school systems, day care centers or summer camp providers take appropriate precautions regarding outdoor activity on smog alert days. Mothers & Others for Clean Air is leading an effort to reach out to child care providers in the metro area to encourage them to use expert guidelines to develop policies and procedures for adjusting outdoor activities when air pollution concentrations are high. Please contact Mothers & Others for Clean Air program manager Rebecca Watts Hull (rwattshull@gaconservancy.org) with any questions or to volunteer to help with this outreach effort.