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Hot Summer Days Can Trigger High Pollution Levels That Cause Health Problems

July marks the beginning of summer and hot, hazy days. With the first wave of hot weather this summer, LRAPA would like to remind residents that the heat also brings higher concentrations of ground-level ozone, or smog, which can result in health problems for some people.

“When we experience temperatures in the 90s, the ozone levels start to climb and air quality begins to deteriorate,” said Sally Markos, of LRAPA. “There are two problems when this happens: the health impacts it causes for many people, and the possibility of our area exceeding the federal clean air health standard.”

LRAPA wants to remind people to avoid behaviors that contribute to high ozone levels, such as excessive driving, using gas-powered lawn equipment during the heat of the day, and using paints and solvents. If you have to fill up your car’s gas tank, it’s important to wait until evening to refuel your vehicle and ask the attendant to not top off your tank. Fumes that escape during the refueling process contribute to the formation of ozone. Also, turn off your vehicle at drive-up windows to reduce idling time.

“It’s important people curb these types of behaviors to keep ozone concentrations as low as possible. The result will be fewer adverse health effects on people whose heart and respiratory systems are compromised, and those with asthma,” Markos said. Ozone can irritate the respiratory system, causing coughing, a sore throat and tightening in the chest; reduce the lungs’ ability to function, making it difficult to breathe deeply; can aggravate asthma, triggering asthma attacks; and aggravate chronic lung diseases such as emphysema and bronchitis. Ground level ozone can also damage crops, trees, and other vegetation.

“People who exercise outside should avoid doing so in the late afternoon, when ozone levels generally begin to rise,” said Markos. Ground level ozone forms in the presence of hot temperatures, sunshine and mild breezes. Ozone levels are generally cyclic. During the cool temperatures of the night, levels drop, then begin to rise again during the heat of the day, with the highest concentrations usually after 5:00 PM.

The public can track hourly ozone levels by logging onto the LRAPA website at www.LRAPA.org.

For more tips about ways to help, visit www.lrapa.org/public_education/air_action_days/

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