

Clearing the Air, One Household at a Time



Summer 2006 Visit www.cleanaircounts.org

Summer Smog

Did you know that ground-level ozone is more likely to form on hot, sunny days? The reason is that heat and sunlight are necessary components in the formation of smog. When ozone-forming gases (like NOx emissions from cars) are exposed to sunlight and hot temperatures, they absorb energy from the sun and undergo chemical reactions that create ground-level ozone.

Because air pollution is damaging to health, it is important to be alert to the day-to-day quality of the air outside, potential health risks involved with outdoor activities. This newsletter provides information to help you stay healthy this summer, and also gives Clean Air Counts tips to reduce your impact on indoor and outdoor air pollution.

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Clean Air Counts is a Chicago regional initiative of the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the City of Chicago, and the Illinois EPA. We seek significant reductions in smog-forming pollutants and energy consumption.

Clean Air Counts for Children in South Chicago

In addition to making their facilities greener, there are many different ways for organizations to collaborate with Clean Air Counts. Recently, CAC staff from the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) collaborated with the Field Museum to educate students in South Chicago about air pollution. CAC worked with students from Mireles School in South Chicago, and also taught students from Taylor and Jane Addams Schools at Calumet Stewardship Day.

During these sessions, CAC provided information about the various causes and effects of smog. Students experience high levels of air pollution in their neighborhood, so they were eager to learn about its chemical composition, sources, and health effects. They quickly grasped the connection between turning off lights and appliances and reducing air pollution.

The students also participated in hands-on activities like making their own low-VOC window cleaner. After mixing vinegar, a splash of dish soap, and water in a reusable spray bottle, the students could take home their own nontoxic and inexpensive window cleaner. The Mireles students also made additional window cleaner for their school janitors. Everybody was excited to be able to improve indoor air quality at home and at school.



In addition, the students learned how to calculate the money saved over the lifetime of a compact fluorescent bulb (CFL), which is more energy-efficient than incandescent bulbs. Several of the students had heard of CFLs and even had some in their homes, but were not aware of just how much money and energy they were saving!

Teachers, including Ms. Gnatt and Ms. Gresham, plan to do further projects to calculate energy and money savings of upgrading lighting and appliances in the school and students' homes. They want to encourage the school administration and students' parents to make some of these positive changes.

CAC staff look forward to participating in more educational opportunities. By getting kids involved, we hope to instill proactive attitudes towards the environment at an early age. Students can also act as ambassadors for clean air when they go home, and share ways to reduce indoor and outdoor air pollution with their parents!

Clean Air Counts Welcomes New Members:

- The Shedd Aquarium
- Wicker Park & Bucktown Chamber of Commerce
- North Center Chamber of Commerce
- South Shore Chamber of Commerce
- South Chicago Chamber of Commerce
- Steel City Furniture
- Corazon a Corazon
- Veteran's Improvement Association

Action Days:

Everything You Need to Know To Stay Healthy and Improve Air Quality

STAY INFORMED

When pollution levels are high, Action Days are declared to alert the public to potential health threats. The best way to stay up-to-date on information and alerts about levels of air pollution is to use the **Air Quality Index, or AQI**. This index can be found on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's AIRNow website (www.airnow.gov), as well as in many newspapers and weather reports. The AQI shows real-time smog levels throughout the day. This means you can see how clean or polluted your air is, and find out about corresponding health risks. The table to the right gives index numbers and corresponding health risks.

Clean Air Counts strategies like alternative transportation, energy efficiency, low-VOC products, and native landscaping help to cut down the number of days that air pollution reaches unhealthy levels. Log onto the **Clean Air Counts website** (www.cleanaircounts.org) for more information on preventing air pollution.

Good (0-50)

Air quality is considered satisfactory, and air pollution poses little or no risk.

Moderate (51-100)

Air quality is acceptable.

Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (101-150)

Members of sensitive groups may experience health effects. The general public is not likely to be affected when the AQI is in this range.

Unhealthy (151-200)

Everyone may begin to experience health effects. Members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.

Very Unhealthy (201-300) Triggers a health alert, meaning everyone may experience more serious health effects.

Hazardous (over 300) Triggers health warnings of emergency conditions. The entire population is more likely to be affected.

WHO IS MOST AT RISK?

Higher levels of air pollution are harmful to all of us, but there are certain groups of people that are especially susceptible to negative health effects. When air quality reaches "orange", the AQI suggests that these groups of people be especially cautious about physical exertion outdoors:

- **Children:** They have smaller airways, incompletely developed respiratory defenses, and breathe 50% more air per pound of body than adults. Many studies have indicated that ozone exposure is a major factor in determining whether a child will develop asthma.
- **Senior Citizens:** Studies have shown that the elderly are more likely to be hospitalized for heart and lung problems when ozone levels are high.
- **People with pre-existing respiratory diseases:** Those who suffer from asthma, chronic bronchitis, and emphysema make more trips to the hospital on Action Days for aggravated symptoms of their affliction. In the long run, ozone exposure can worsen their conditions.

YOUR CAR, YOUR AIR



Auto related emissions cause almost 50% of smog-forming NOx emissions (www.epa.gov). In the summer, driving is more likely to result in ground-level ozone because the hot temperatures and sun contribute to smog formation. Here are some simple changes you can make to reduce the amount of emissions your car releases:

CAR TIPS FOR SUMMER

- **Pump gas into your car after sunset.** It sounds simple, but since heat and sunlight are two necessary components for smog formation, NOx and VOC emissions are less likely to become ground-level ozone when released at night.
- **Keep up the scheduled maintenance of your car:** monitor oil, air filters, belts, and properly inflated tires. Your car will pollute less and get better gas mileage, which will save you money on gas.
- **If possible, drive less or car-pool.** It's warm outside, so walk, bike, or take the CTA, Metra, or PACE. Go to www.travelmatters.org and use their interactive emissions calculators to find out exactly how your transportation decisions are helping the environment!

EXERCISING ON "ACTION DAYS"

Here are a few tips to avoid negative health effects when exercising outdoors on Action Days:

- Avoid extended periods of physical exercise outdoors. The longer you exert yourself, the harder and faster you have to breathe.
- Substitute an activity that is less vigorous (i.e. take a walk instead of jogging).
- Participate in outdoor activities in the early morning or evening when ozone levels are lower.

Lawnmowers for Cleaner Air

DID YOU KNOW?

- Cumulatively, lawnmowers produce about 5% of the nation's urban air pollution (Source: U.S. EPA).
- Retiring 1,000 gasoline-powered lawnmowers spares the region approximately 26 tons of VOC emissions!



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- If possible, use electric, battery, or non-motorized mowers.
- If you use a fuel-powered mower, remember that it functions like a car: it is less likely to cause ozone formation early in the morning or at night.
- Mow your lawn less frequently. It is actually a natural form of pest control! If you keep your grass higher (2.5-3 inches), it improves natural irrigation and helps to prevent insect infestation.
- **Check out the Municipalities section on www.cleanaircounts.org for information about lawncare buyback events where you can trade in old, polluting lawncare equipment for rebates on cordless, electric or push powered equipment.**

Meet your daily exercise needs by taking public transit!

A new study shows that taking transit helps millions of Americans stay healthy. The American Journal of Preventive Medicine finds that people who take transit to work (shown above) walk about 20 minutes per day to catch the bus and train. 29 percent of transit users met the U.S. Surgeon General's recommendations for daily physical activity, walking at least 30 minutes.

Lilah M. Besser, a researcher at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, says, "[The research] demonstrates that an additional benefit to encouraging new transit opportunities and using existing transit is that it can increase physical activity levels." Currently, only about 5 percent of all trips are made by transit. In addition to saving money and helping the environment, meeting daily exercise needs is now another benefit of hopping on the bus or train.

Clean Air "Counts," So Report It!

Do you ever wonder how much pollution you've prevented by changing all those incandescent bulbs in your house to compact fluorescents? As a member of Clean Air Counts, you have an online resource that allows you to quantify the exact amount of smog-forming emissions you have spared Chicago air.

If you want to find out how your actions impact the environment, just log onto your account on the CAC website and go to our "Reporting" section. With basic information like how many bulbs you have changed in your house, the emissions calculator will tell you the exact amount of VOCs and NOx emissions that you avoided releasing into the air.

Clean air "counts" because it is important to everyone's health, but it also "counts" because we quantify the environmental impact of your actions. Your reports tell us how much closer we are to meeting our goal of reducing emissions in Chicago by 5 tons per day. Let us know about your environmental achievements and the positive impact you have made on air quality in the region!

The Solution to Car Trouble: Workplace Transportation Options

Do you walk, bike, or take public transportation to work as frequently as you can, but wonder how to get more people motivated to do the same thing? If you want to encourage the use of alternative means of transportation in your workplace, let employers know about Workplace Transportation Options (WTO). WTO helps businesses reduce the number of commuters driving alone each workday, which can save employers and employees money and boost productivity.

Vanpools/Ridesharing

Employers can provide a program for car and vanpool matching and work with local transit agencies to enhance convenience through shuttle services and sidewalk stops. Check out www.sharethedriver.org for a carpool/vanpool ride matching system that encompasses the greater Chicagoland area.

Transit Benefit Program

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) offers companies a program that reduces commuting costs for both employers and employees. RTA Transit Checks are tax-deductible to employers and a tax-free benefit to employees who use the CTA, Metra, Pace, the South Shore or vanpools. Employees can set aside up to 100 pre-tax dollars per month to pay for transit and vanpool commuting costs. This reduces employers' payroll taxes as well!

Clean Air Counts helps businesses and organizations facilitate alternative methods of transit for free! To get started, please contact us at Emily@cnt.org.

StepStepStep
1 2 3 Results
Submit and Results

When finished with each step click the "Continue" button at the bottom of the page. If you wish to save and complete the report later click the save icon. **Please Note: Required fields are denoted with an asterisk "*"!**

Report Complete!

Thank you for completing your Clean Air Counts reporting form. Your dedication in helping to clean the air we breathe is not only appreciated but is making a difference to the air quality in the Chicago region.

Emissions Results**

Total reported:	0
Total reductions:	48.9375
Tons/day:	0

Sample Report Saving 48.93 lbs of pollution!



CLEAN AIR COUNTS

Center for Neighborhood
Technology
2125 North Avenue
Chicago, IL 60647

Phone: (773) 269-4070
Email: Emily@cnt.org



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Find CAC at these Upcoming Events:

- **Halsted St. Market Days**—August 5-6
- **Pilsen Cultural Celebration**—August 12-13
- **West Fest**—August 12-13

Other Environmental Events in Chicago:

- **Chicago's Household Hazardous Waste, Electronics Recycling & Lawnmower Buy-back Day** (August 12, 8:00am-3:00pm) Located in North Park Village, 5801 N. Pulaski
- **ECO TRANSPORTATION SHOW** (August 15, 5:30-9:00pm) Chicago Green Drinks hosts this event, which is the first of its kind in Chicago. Located along the east side of the 300 block of N. Jefferson, there will be a display of a variety of eco-friendly transportation options such as hybrids, biodiesel, compressed natural gas vehicles, bikes, I-Go cars, etc. There will also be an opportunity to speak to the owners/users, and a panel on *City Planning for More Sustainable Transportation* from 7-8pm.
- **Green City Summer market** (Every Wednesday and Saturday morning, May 20-October) Located north of LaSalle Street in Lincoln Park along the path between 1750 N. Clark and Stockton Drive (go to www.cityofchicago.org/specialevents for listings of all farmer's markets in Chicago)



Are you interested in meeting other individuals committed to creating a greener Chicago? Attend **Chicago Green Drinks** monthly events.

The meetings are an informal opportunity for people interested in sustainability/environmental issues

to gather, network, learn what others are doing, and discuss issues that are important to them. See the Calendar to the left for upcoming events.

For more info, visit www.chicagogreendrinks.org/
Come get to know more active people in the Chicago environmental scene!



Check out **Growing Home's Urban Farm** products at the weekly Saturday Green City Summer markets (see Calendar of Events). Not only are you purchasing delicious organic produce, you are also supporting a transitional employment program for homeless and low-income people in the organic farming business.

For more information or a list of participating restaurants in the area, visit this link:

<http://www.growinghomeinc.org/>