

## Emergency Citizen Alert: Unhealthy Air Quality

Maine DEP warns of unhealthy air quality level along state's coast Thurs. July 21 & Fri. July 22.

\*-As parts of the state experience unusually hot weather over the next two days, the Maine Center for Disease Control also is advising Mainers to take precautions to prevent heat illness as extreme heat, especially in conjunction with air quality issues, can be dangerous.\* AUGUSTA - The Maine Department of Environmental Protection is warning Mainers to expect unhealthy air quality tomorrow along the state's coast between Kittery and Acadia National Park due to elevated ground-level ozone concentrations. This is the second air quality alert issued by the department this year.

Meteorologists from the department's Bureau of Air Quality say these unhealthy levels mean individuals in these areas who are sensitive to pollution should reduce their exposure and exertion. In addition, ozone levels will be moderate for the interior and Downeast regions of the state and particle pollution levels will be in the moderate range for the entire state, which may aggravate the health effects of the elevated ozone pollution for sensitive groups. Exposure to elevated ozone and particle pollution can aggravate existing heart and lung conditions like asthma or congestive heart disease and cause children and even healthy adults to experience reduced lung function and irritation when exerting themselves. As a result, Mainers are encouraged to take precaution to protect their health during periods of unhealthy air quality, including avoiding strenuous activity, such as jogging, alongside busier roads and during mid-day; closing windows and circulating indoor air with a fan or air conditioner; and avoiding exposure. Ground-level ozone, commonly known as smog, is created by the chemical reaction between volatile organic compounds, nitrogen oxides and sunlight. Man-made sources of these compounds include automobiles; trucks and buses; large combustion and industrial sources such as power generating facilities; household products such as paints and cleaners; and gas-powered lawn and garden equipment. When ozone levels are elevated, the Maine DEP and the federal Environmental Protection Agency urge the public to take action and help reduce ozone-smog by: choosing a cleaner commute like public transportation or carpooling; deferred the use of gas-powered lawn and garden equipment until after dusk; limiting idling of vehicles; and refueling vehicles at night to reduce gasoline vapors getting in the air and coming into contact with the sun to form ozone. Maine DEP provides a variety of tools for the public and press to stay informed on the current levels and resulting impacts to human health. Daily air quality forecasts are available on the department's website at [www.mainedep.com](http://www.mainedep.com) (click on "Maine Air Quality Forecasts") and via a toll-free hotline which can be accessed by dialing (800) 223-1196. People who are affected by poor air quality including asthmatics and those with heart conditions as well as those like sports coaches, elder care workers and nurses who are responsible for the welfare of people impacted by poor air quality are also urged to sign up at [www.enviroflash.info](http://www.enviroflash.info) for EnviroFlash, an automated, zip code based electronic alert system that warns when air quality is likely to be poor locally through text messages and email notifications. Forecasts can also be accessed each day on the

Maine DEP Air Bureau's four Twitter accounts, one for each region where air quality alerts have been issued in recent years including midcoast (Twitter handle: meair\_acadia), eastern interior (Twitter handle: meair\_bangor), western interior (Twitter handle: meair\_lewiston) and the southwest coast (Twitter handle: meair\_portland). As parts of the state experience unusually hot weather over the next two days, the Maine Center for Disease Control is advising Mainers to take precautions to prevent heat illness as extreme heat, especially in conjunction with air quality issues, can be dangerous. Steps to stay safe include staying cool, drinking appropriate fluids and laying low. Heat and humidity will be highest on Thursday and persist through Friday in the southern and southwestern parts of the state, especially in York, Cumberland and Oxford Counties, CDC officials say. More information on staying safe can be found at the Maine CDC heat page at [www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/heat/index.shtml](http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/heat/index.shtml).