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Preparing Monitors for Ozone Season is an Important Process;
Air Quality Awareness Week, May 2-6

May 2-6, 2011, is Air Quality Awareness Week, but Ohio EPA's air quality monitoring program is a year-round effort.

Last year, Ohio EPA operated 242 air monitors at 128 monitoring sites around the state. The monitors routinely check levels of sulfur dioxide, lead, particulate matter, nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide and ozone. The data, which Ohio EPA analyzes and reports to U.S. EPA, determines whether Ohio's air meets federal standards established to protect public health.

The pollutant most people are concerned about during the summer is ozone. When certain pollutants mix with sunlight and are cooked by very warm temperatures, a chemical reaction causes ground-level ozone to form. Sometimes referred to as smog, unhealthy levels of ground-level ozone can cause coughing, throat irritation and breathing discomfort.

Ohio EPA has 49 ozone monitors in 33 counties that monitor from April through October, the official ozone season. Even in the off season, work is done to make sure the data collected is accurate. To ensure accuracy, dedicated monitors are taken to U.S. EPA's Region V office in Chicago each year, and calibrated to U.S. EPA's standard reference photometer. Beginning in the fall the monitors are brought indoors, cleaned up, refurbished and calibrated to match the settings obtained in Chicago on the dedicated monitors. In March, they are put back into service where they are used to take readings all season long.

During ozone season, the monitors are remotely checked each day, even on weekends and holidays, to be certain they are operating properly and the settings are steady. Every week, a site visit is made to check the monitor and other equipment. In addition to these checks, the monitors are calibrated in the field roughly two times per ozone season. Accuracy is critical since only one part per billion could mean the difference between meeting the ozone standard or exceeding it. If the air quality standard is exceeded, it takes at least an additional three years to demonstrate the region is attaining the ozone standard.

The monitors benefit Ohioans because they can access readings daily on the [AirOhio](#) website and check the air quality index. You can also obtain regular air quality forecasts online at U.S. EPA's [AirNow](#) site. By following the color coded air quality index, sensitive populations can learn whether breathing outside air is likely to be difficult for them on a given day.

Ohioans can help reduce ozone-causing pollution. For example:

- Conserve electricity and set your air conditioner a few degrees higher.
- Choose a cleaner commute by sharing a ride to work or using public transit.
- Combine errands to reduce the number of trips.
- Bicycle or walk while doing errands.
- Use gasoline-powered lawn mower and garden equipment later in the day when air temperatures begin to cool and are less likely to contribute to ozone pollution.
- Refuel cars and trucks after dusk and limit engine idling.
- Tune up your vehicle for energy efficiency, and replace gas cap tightly to prevent vapors from escaping.
- Paint with a brush instead of a sprayer and buy low-VOC paint.