

## Air quality plan will ask for Idahoans' help

### Governor-appointed council to vote on new incentives, rules for fresher air

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**Idaho Statesman**

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The sound of lawn mowers running into the twilight is music to Leonard Herr's ears.

Herr, an air quality specialist for the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality in Boise, issued a yellow alert for rising ozone pollution earlier this week. Sunlight and heat causes pollutants from cars, industry, gasoline vapors and farms to react and create ozone, a pale blue gas that causes burning of the lungs even at low levels.

So Herr is trying to get the word out for people to fill their gas tanks in the morning and the evening, drive less and mow the lawn at night. Ozone levels dropped Wednesday.

"I'm always encouraged when the numbers go down under alert," Herr said.

Getting Treasure Valley residents to change their behavior not only during alerts but year-round is a major goal of the Treasure Valley Air Quality Council. Appointed by Gov. Dirk Kempthorne in November 2005 after authorization by the Idaho Legislature, the council was required to write a draft air control plan for the valley by July 1, a deadline it expects to meet.

"We've done what was intended to be a year-long task in six months," said Peter O'Neil, the Boise developer who chairs the council.

The council is developing a plan it can take to the Legislature that would put rules in place to keep Treasure Valley air clean without dramatic regulatory changes. And that means pushing for residents to make lifestyle changes such as reducing the number of daily car trips or choosing the right time of day to mow the lawn.

The plan is needed to head off federal takeover of air quality regulations because the region is close to exceeding federal air quality health standards. If that happens, industries would face new and tougher regulations and building new roads would become harder.

Based on health studies conducted elsewhere, including nearby Salt Lake City, more people with lung and heart ailments would die before their time — called access deaths — if air quality gets worse.

Ozone pollution levels already have exceeded federal health standards, twice in 2001, five times in 2002 and once in 2003. In December 2002, Ada and Canyon counties exceeded federal health standards for fine particulates, DEQ records show.

"We have achieved air pollution concentrations that are at the same levels that have caused excess deaths in other cities," said Dale Stephenson, a Boise State University public health professor who serves on the council.

The council is set to vote on a draft plan today that encourages public education, voluntary measures and incentives to cut pollution, and stricter rules to make that happen.

The council is expected to recommend the state create rules requiring gas stations to install by 2009 systems to reduce vapors released during refueling. It also is expected to recommend the Legislature approve an airshed district across Ada and Canyon counties so officials can establish an innovative new emissions testing program.

Canyon County backed off an emissions ordinance in 2002 for lack of support, and Ada residents have been frustrated that Canyon residents haven't had to participate in the program.

But the new program would use the diagnostic equipment installed in all vehicles since 1996. Older models would not have to be tested, but "gross polluters" would be caught by drive-by monitors on highways and required to submit to further testing.

Ordinances for local governments to control open burning, burn bans and dust also are under consideration. And the Air Quality Council hopes to convince local governments to try to reduce auto trips to cut air pollution as they plan future growth.

"If we can accomplish half of what they recommend we'll be in good stead," said Alan Shealy, a Boise city councilman.

The council will soon kick off a campaign to get the public involved in writing the final plan. It is forming a citizens committee it hopes will build broad-based public support before it takes the final plan to the Idaho Legislature in 2007.

The 14-member council is heavy with industry and business representatives, which elicited criticism when Kempthorne announced the members — critics feared industry would be ignored in the regulations. But DEQ pollution inventories show that pollution from the highly regulated industrial sector makes up a relatively small part of the pollutants that cause ozone and particulate pollution.

"It's easy to focus on the smoke stacks as a pollution source," said John McCreedy, vice president and general counsel of Amalgamated Sugar and an air quality council member. "What's hard to focus on are the many other sources that are out there that are not so visible."

Amalgamated is installing an \$18 million steam pulp drier to replace coal-fired driers. The upgrade will make the plant more efficient, but it also will significantly reduce air pollution.

Most of all, it's us and our cars, DEQ shows. The population of Ada and Canyon counties has risen to 559,000 people and is expected to double by 2020.

Even though increasingly tougher federal air standards for cars and a comprehensive air emissions program will continue to cut pollution, growth will overwhelm the improvements, said Jay Witt, a planner with the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho.

But forcing local governments to limit growth in ways that reduce travel is difficult and will take time, O'Neil said. The idea behind the air quality council was to develop a package that could reduce pollution quickly.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has proposed reducing the pollution limits for fine particles, an action that likely would place both Ada and Canyon counties over federal standards, what is called nonattainment. This is the second ozone alert already this year.

"All it would take is one bad summer and we'd be in nonattainment," Herr said.



Chris Butler / Idaho Statesman

Ralph Boyette of Pocatello welds part of the new steam dryer system Wednesday morning at the Amalgamated Sugar Co. in Nampa. The new unit will replace the old coal-fired pulp drivers when it's completed this fall. It's expected not only to be more efficient, but also to reduce air pollution.

- [Clean Air Idaho -Air Quality Initiatives in Idaho](#)
- [Clean Air Idaho - Treasure Valley Air Quality Council](#)
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## Air quality facts

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### **How do I apply for the citizens committee?**

Those interested in serving on the citizens committee should contact Dale Stephenson, 841-8950 or [dalestephenson@boisestate.edu](mailto:dalestephenson@boisestate.edu) or Ethan Curtis and Kris Kamann, Scott Peyron & Associates, 388-3800 or [ecurtis@peyron.com](mailto:ecurtis@peyron.com) or [kkamann@peyron.com](mailto:kkamann@peyron.com).

### **What are the major pollutants and their health effects?**

**PARTICULATES:** The wintertime pollutant of most concern is particles 2.5 microns in diameter or smaller. ( A human hair is about 70 microns in diameter). The pollution comes directly from sources such as autos and burning wood. It also forms when gases from burning fuels react with water vapor and cold, stagnant air. Those smaller particles are breathed most deeply into the lungs and are considered the most hazardous to human health. The EPA says particulate pollution has been linked to heart attacks and other medical problems.

**OZONE:** Ozone is a pale blue gas, a form of oxygen, that causes burning of the lungs even at low levels. It irritates the eyes and other tissues and aggravates existing respiratory and cardiac conditions. Prolonged exposure can cause permanent damage to the lungs.

Ozone forms when nitrogen oxide gas, emitted primarily from cars, mixes with volatile organic chemicals in the atmosphere and is "cooked" by sunlight. The chemicals come from a wide variety of sources; most are natural, but major sources also include dairies and feed lots.

Cars are one of the major sources of volatile organic chemicals and nitrogen oxides. Another source of volatile organic chemicals is fumes of gasoline spilled during refueling or emitted from tank farms.

### **How would the new emissions testing program work?**

The proposed emissions testing program for Ada and Canyon counties would use the diagnostic equipment installed in all vehicles since 1996. Older models would not have to be tested, but "gross polluters" would be identified and required to submit to further testing.

A fee would be added to the registration for all vehicles in Ada and Canyon counties, probably \$5. A emissions test in Ada County currently costs up to \$15.

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