

Local News

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Cleveland air not up to snuff, advocates say

Volunteers will monitor ozone levels

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PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

Two environmental groups rate Cleveland's air quality as poor and will supply monitors to neighborhoods, including Tremont and University Circle.

While the air in Northeast Ohio meets federal health standards, ozone since 1994, the Environmental Defense and the Clean Air

Conservancy suspect that the air Clevelanders breathe is worse, in part, because only one of the 17 federal air pollution monitors that measures ozone is in the city.

"We're convinced there is a bigger public health threat than the current monitoring demonstrates," said Kevin Snape, who heads the Clean Air Conservancy, a Cleveland Heights-based group that seeks to reduce air pollution. "The air quality in Cleveland stinks."

The two groups released a report yesterday that criticizes the area's bad air quality, which it graded as 'D', the lack of ozone monitoring, and the failure to implement a strategy to address industrial ozone smog.

Michele Whitow, head of Cleveland's Department of Public Health, and Mark Vlem, project coordinator with Cleveland's air pollution control office, took issue with the poor grade. Vlem said he would give the county's air a "B plus."

"We're in attainment, which is the official designation for meeting air quality standards," Vlem said.

Starting next month, the two groups will use volunteers to take air readings daily in Cleveland neighborhoods so folks there will know what ozone quality is outside their door. Besides Tremont and University Circle, Snape also will have monitors in West Park, Lee-Harvard and W. 6th-

Lakeshore. Other locations will be selected soon.

Environmental Defense has bought the first set of monitors, which are prototypes and cost about \$130 apiece. Cleveland would be the first city in the nation to use the hand-held devices, which are about the size of a cell phone, Snape said.

The monitors contain ozone-sensitive cards that change color depending on how much ozone is present. By next spring, the Clean Air Conservancy expects to add up to 40 more monitors around Cuyahoga County.

"The real point of this technology is that it allows for the public to take action and discover what's happening in their own back yard," said Halley Rosen, a member of Environmental Defense.

Both federal and local air officials would embrace such a grassroots monitoring program.

"I don't think it could hurt to have more data, as long as they have people and resources to analyze it," said Scott Hamilton, an environmental scientist with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "We probably would be very interested in seeing that data."

Ozone, the main ingredient of smog, irritates lungs and harms plants. It forms spontaneously when fumes from smokstacks, vehicles, solvents and other sources mix together and cook in the hot sun.

The region's air monitors meet federal requirements for the number and locations, Hamilton said. Besides three monitors in Cuyahoga County, the other 14 monitors are in Lake, Ashabula, Geauga, Lorain, Portage, Summit, Trumbull and Stark counties.

On some days, the air in Tremont can smell like onions or sulfur and drop gray grit on cars and homes, resident Kyle Dreyfuss-Wells said.

"It would be great if they would put a monitor in the neighborhood," Dreyfuss-Wells said. "I don't know how technically bad the air is. But there is a lot of concern about the smog."

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