



THE AIR QUALITY INDEX

Using Air Quality Information to Protect Yourself from Ozone Air Pollution

The Air Quality Index, or AQI, is the standardized system that state and local air pollution control programs use to notify the public about levels of air pollution. Keeping track of the current air quality information can help you plan your activities during various seasons so as to minimize your exposure to unhealthy levels of air pollution. This is especially important for people who are sensitive to air pollution, including young children, people with asthma and other lung diseases, and the elderly, *as well as those who exercise outdoors.*

How Does the Air Quality Index Work?

In metropolitan areas, air pollution levels are measured daily and ranked on a scale of 0 for pristine air all the way up to 500 for air pollution levels that pose immediate danger to the public (fortunately, we do not have pollution levels that high in this country any more). The AQI further breaks air pollution levels into five categories, each of which has a descriptor (name), an associated color, and advisory statements to go along with it.

Index Value	Descriptor	Color	Advisory
0 to 50	Good	Green	None
51 to 100	Moderate	Yellow	Unusually sensitive individuals should consider limiting prolonged outdoor exertion
101 to 150	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	Orange	Children, active adults, and people with respiratory disease, such as asthma, should limit prolonged outdoor exertion
151 to 200	Unhealthy	Red	Children, active adults, and people with respiratory disease, such as asthma, should avoid prolonged outdoor exertion; everyone else should limit prolonged outdoor exertion
201 to 300	Very Unhealthy	Purple	Children, active adults, and people with respiratory disease, such as asthma, should avoid outdoor exertion; everyone else should limit outdoor exertion
301-500	Hazardous	Maroon	

What Can You Do to Protect Yourself and Your Family?

- ✓ Are you or someone in your family sensitive to ozone? Children, the elderly, people with breathing problems including asthma, and adults who are active outdoors, including outdoor workers and healthy exercisers, are all considered “sensitive groups”. They are the first to feel the effects of ozone air pollution, and need to take extra steps to protect themselves from harm.
- ✓ Keep track of air pollution levels. Find out if the AQI is reported in your area, which will give you the previous day’s information. You may also have access to an air quality forecast, which is even better.
- ✓ If the air quality is unhealthy, you may need to adjust your plans for the day. Avoid prolonged vigorous activity outdoors. The health effects of ozone are worsened over extended periods of exposure, and by the deep, rapid breathing that accompanies exercise. Plan the most strenuous activities for the early morning hours, which in most areas occur before ozone levels climb.
- ✓ Speak out for clean air. Let your local officials know that you are concerned about the effect air pollution may be having on your health, and that you would support stronger pollution control measures.

How Do You Find Air Quality Information?

- ✓ Air quality information may be included as part of your local weather forecast on TV and radio, or printed in the newspaper. If it is not available, call your local media and tell them you would like them to offer this important public health service.
- ✓ In Washington , visit Department of Ecology’s website <http://airr.ecy.wa.gov/Public/aqn.shtml>
- ✓ State and local air pollution control agencies are responsible for collecting air quality data and reporting the AQI. You can call them for current information if it is not available through the media. A directory of state and local agencies is available from STAPPA/ALAPCO, their national membership association, at www.4cleanair.org.
- ✓ The EPA collects current air quality information from approximately 42 states that have volunteered to participate in an ozone-mapping project. The ozone map is an animated picture of ozone levels superimposed over a map of the U.S., illustrating how pollution levels change and move throughout the day. It is “real time” information, meaning you can view the map and be informed of relatively current outdoor air quality. The ozone map is available at www.epa.gov/airnow. The EPA also makes it available to local weather forecasters through national weather service providers.

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The 2002 Air Quality chart presents an overview for counties reporting the Air Quality Index. More detailed air quality data are available from the state Department of Ecology at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/air/airhome.html> or at specific local air agency Web sites. To learn more about the Air Quality Index, visit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Web site at www.epa.gov/airnow/aqibroch/.

	Good	Moderate	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups	Unhealthy
Puget Sound/ Western *				
Clallam	283	82		
Grays Harbor	116	21		
Island				
Jefferson	327	38		
King	270	91	4	
Kitsap				
Mason	214	5		
Pierce	269	85	10	1
Skagit	272	1		
Snohomish	288	69	8	
Thurston	301	61	3	
Whatcom	97	11		
Southwest				
Clark	336	26	3	
Cowlitz	361	4		
Lewis	360	5		
Skamania	361	4		
Southeast **				
Adams				
Benton	346	18	1	
Franklin				
Kittitas				
Klickitat				
Walla Walla				
Whitman				
Yakima				
Northeast ***				
Chelan				
Spokane	274	84	7	
Stevens				

* Puget Sound/Western Washington: Mason County data is from Jan. 1 to Aug. 7; Grays Harbor data is from Aug. 1 to Dec. 31; Whatcom County and Skagit County data are partial-year; AQI data are not available for Island or Kitsap counties.

** Southeast Washington: Air Quality Index data are not available for Adams, Franklin, Kittitas, Klickitat, Walla Walla, Whitman or Yakima.

*** Northeast Washington: Air Quality Index data are not available for Chelan and Stevens counties.