

# NEWS RELEASE



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## **Illinois Officials Expand Air Quality Messaging to Educate Residents and Encourage Actions to Protect Public Health**

*Air Pollution Action Day Program Expanding Statewide for Air Quality Alerts*

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (Illinois EPA) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) have established new Illinois-specific guidelines for issuing air quality messages to the public to provide additional guidance for public health measures. The Illinois EPA is incorporating all [14 sectors](#) where air quality is forecasted in Illinois into the Air Pollution Action Day program, expanding the existing program beyond the Chicago Metropolitan Area (Cook and surrounding counties). These air quality messages are a call to action for residents to protect their health and for residents and businesses to reduce local contribution to air pollution.

“In recent weeks, as a result of wildfire smoke in the region, Illinois has experienced air quality conditions at levels we have not seen in recent decades,” **said Illinois EPA Director John J. Kim**. “In anticipation of future such events, we want to ensure residents take precautions to protect their health and limit exposure when air quality conditions deteriorate. Residents are encouraged to subscribe to Free air quality forecasts and alerts through the [EnviroFlash](#) program and to monitor daily and hourly air quality conditions at [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov).”

“As Illinois continues to face challenges with poor and dangerous air quality, it is important for residents to be better aware of the air quality forecasts in their community and take the necessary precautions to protect their health and the health of their loved ones,” **said IDPH Director Dr. Sameer Vohra**. “IDPH encourages our residents to be aware and follow Illinois EPA’s air quality forecasts. If you live in a part of Illinois that is experiencing poor or dangerous air quality, precautions to stay healthy include staying indoors, if able, keeping windows and doors closed, and wearing high quality masks when outdoors. These precautions are especially important for those who are elderly or very young and for those with lung or heart conditions.”

Like the weather, air quality can change from day to day. The Illinois EPA issues daily air quality forecasts, based on the [Air Quality Index](#) (AQI), for 14 sectors in Illinois and posts the information at [www.airnow.gov](http://www.airnow.gov). The AQI is a color-coded system that classifies air quality from Good (Green) to Hazardous (Maroon). Residents are also encouraged to

subscribe to receive FREE air quality forecasts via email or Twitter at <http://enviroflash.info> and download the Free **AIRNow App** for iPhone and Android phones: [iPhone App](#) | [Android App](#).

Beyond air quality forecasts, several regions throughout the United States have “Action Day” programs, which are typically called when the AQI registers in the unhealthy ranges. In Illinois, the **Air Pollution Action Day** program has been specific to only the Chicago Metropolitan Region (Cook and surrounding counties). Illinois EPA has now expanded the Air Pollution Action Day program to include all 14 sectors where air quality is forecasted in Illinois. An Air Pollution Action Day will be issued the afternoon before and will run from issuance through the duration of the next calendar day. Conditions that will trigger an Air Pollution Action Day are:

1. Air quality is forecasted to be at or above the Orange or “Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups” category of the AQI **for two or more consecutive days** for the Chicago Metropolitan Area (Cook and surrounding counties); **OR**
2. Air quality is forecasted to be at or above the Orange or “Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups” category on the AQI **Statewide** or in **a majority of Illinois sectors**.

As a result of increased incidents of poor air quality, specific guidelines have also been established for issuing **Air Quality Alerts** to the public to provide additional guidance for public health measures. Conditions that will trigger an Air Quality Alert are:

1. An Air Pollution Action is issued by Illinois EPA. Historically, the NWS has considered an Action Day forecast as an Air Quality Alert. Therefore, all future Air Quality Alerts will coincide with the NWS procedures.
2. Air Quality is forecasted to be at or above the Red or “Unhealthy” category on the AQI for any sector in Illinois.

When Illinois EPA issues a special air quality statement, such as an Air Pollution Action Day or an Air Quality Alert, it is provided to the National Weather Service (NWS) for distribution through their channels, which includes news meteorologists, weather apps, etc.

Those most at risk due to elevated air pollution, including particle pollution and ground-level ozone, are people with respiratory or pulmonary disorders, as well as children and adults who are active outdoors. Sensitive individuals should follow their doctor’s advice. Some symptoms to look out for include wheezing, coughing, a fast heartbeat, tiredness, chest pain and shortness of breath. If symptoms worsen, call your physician or 911.

All residents should keep cool and limit physical activity outdoors when air quality is poor. Illinois residents are also encouraged to take the following actions to protect themselves when air quality is unhealthy:

- Stay indoors and monitor your breathing, especially if you have heart or lung disease, and keep windows and doors closed.
- If your air conditioner has a fresh air intake, set your system to recirculate or close the intake.

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- Use high efficiency filters in air conditioning systems and portable air cleaners.
- Avoid activities that create more particulate matter indoors, like smoking or burning candles.
- If you cannot avoid working or other outdoor activities, then choose shorter or less intense activities, consider rescheduling if possible, and take more frequent breaks.
- Consider wearing a high-quality N-95 or N-100 mask to filter damaging particles while outdoors.

Residents and businesses can also take the following actions to reduce contributions to local air pollution:

- Reduce transportation: carpool, use public transit, walk, or bike when possible.
- Combine errands to reduce “cold starts” of your vehicle and avoid extended idling.
- Ensure your tires are properly inflated.
- Keep your vehicle and other engines properly tuned.
- Follow gasoline refueling instructions: do not top-off the tank, do not spill fuel, and tighten your gas cap.
- Use environmentally friendly paints and cleaning products.
- Conserve electricity.

Information is also available on the [Illinois EPA website](#) and the [IDPH website](#).