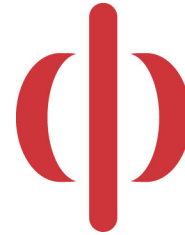


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**RESPIRATORY
HEALTH
ASSOCIATIONSM**
of Metropolitan Chicago

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Ozone smog season may see double the number of unhealthy days

New EPA standard set in March doesn't offer enough protection.

Dry, calm days with warmer temperatures and bright sunlight may sound ideal now, but they are also the perfect conditions for making ozone smog. Chicagoans are itching to shed winter wear to enjoy the sun and many slather on sunscreen to protect their skin, but what about safeguarding their lungs? Summertime smog season is right around the corner as April 1 officially begins ozone season in the Chicago area. Breathing that ozone can damage lungs inside the body similar to the way sunburn harms the skin. Unlike sunscreen, there is no "ozone-screen" to shield lungs.

Ozone is a caustic gas that damages lung tissue, making it more difficult and even painful to breathe on days when air pollution levels increase. Breathing ozone in unhealthy amounts can trigger asthma attacks - increasing the number of trips to the doctor and missed school days. Ozone also increases the number of people going to the emergency room with respiratory difficulties and contributes to thousands of deaths a year in the US.

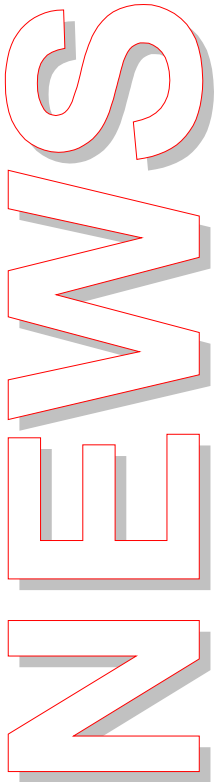
After examining several years worth of published medical science on ozone exposure, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency set a new tighter federal ozone health standard on March 12.

"Medical science showed that ozone smog is dangerous at concentrations lower than what the federal government previously claimed was adequate to protect the public," stated Brian Urbaszewski, Director of Environmental Health Programs for Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago (RHAMC). "The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) really had no choice but to tighten the ozone smog standard."

Although a tighter standard is a step in the right direction for public health, Urbaszewski faulted the EPA for not doing its job under federal clean air laws. "Unfortunately, the EPA simply ignored the recommendations of their own scientific advisors, as well as major national medical and public health organizations; both claimed that the medical evidence supported a tighter ozone limit. In the end, EPA set a health standard for dangerous ozone smog that is still too weak to protect public health."

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Because the standard is getting tighter, it also means that more days will be called as having unhealthy air quality. In the summer of 2007, the air in metropolitan Chicago hit unhealthy levels on eight days, but if the newly adopted ozone smog standard were used last summer, 18 days would have qualified for bad air quality levels. Under the standard endorsed by medical and public health groups, including RHAMC, over 50 days would have been accurately listed as having unhealthy air quality due to high ozone smog levels.

RHAMC still has concerns that the public isn't being given the accurate and scientifically valid information they need to make rational decisions affecting health. "This coming summer, there will be days when the EPA will tell the public that air pollution is only moderate when, according to their own scientific advisors, they should be warning the public about unhealthy air quality. The public is simply not going to get the truth about what they are breathing," said Urbaszewski.

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