

Air Quality Flag Program

July 2009

WHAT IS THE ADEQ AIR QUALITY FLAG PROGRAM?

The Air Quality Flag Program uses nautical-style flags, based on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Air Quality Index (AQI), to notify the public of air quality conditions. Flag programs have been successful in the Phoenix metropolitan area by the Maricopa County Asthma Coalition [www.letus-breathe.org] and in San Joaquin Valley, Calif. The program flies flags that match warning levels of the AQI.

WHY WAS THE FLAG PROGRAM DEVELOPED?

The purpose of this program is to create public awareness of outdoor air quality conditions so people can modify their behavior to reduce exposure to pollutants.

Air quality affects how we live and breathe. Children especially are at greater risk from air pollution because their lungs are still developing and they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults. Chronic exposure to even moderate levels of pollutants may decrease lung function. Therefore, reducing exposure to outdoor air pollutants is a simple way to protect children.

WHAT IS THE AIR QUALITY INDEX?

The AQI tells you how polluted the air is and what associated health effects might be a concern for you. The AQI focuses on health effects you may experience within a few hours or days after breathing polluted air. ADEQ and some local districts calculate the AQI for four major air pollutants regulated by the Clean Air Act: ground-level ozone, PM 10, PM2.5 and carbon monoxide. For each of these pollutants, the EPA has established National Air Quality Standards to protect public health.

WHAT DO THE COLORS MEAN?

The Flag Program uses green, yellow, orange and red flags. These colors correspond to the AQI.



A green flag means that the air quality is good and you do not need to change your outdoor activities.



A yellow flag means air quality is acceptable, but there might be some health concerns for a small number of people.



An orange flag means that pollution levels may be unhealthy for sensitive groups, such as people with lung disease.



A red flag means the air quality is unhealthy, that everybody may begin to feel some health effects, and that members of sensitive groups may experience more serious health effects.

Outdoor activity should be limited for all children and sensitive individuals should stay indoors.

The flags represent different pollutants during different times of the year. From April through October, the flags will be for ozone. From October to March, the flags will be for particulate matter pollution. If a warning is issued for both ozone and particulates, the school will fly the flag that protects the greater at-risk population.

WHERE ARE THE FLAGS POSTED?

The flags will be posted at participating schools and/or community centers in an area visible to the public.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THE FLAG SHOWS THAT THE AIR QUALITY IS POOR?

If your child has asthma or other respiratory ailments, you should consult with the school nurse or the individual responsible for administering the Flag Program. The administrator or nurse will be able to provide you with the appropriate information so you may act accordingly to the air quality level.

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