

Clean Air NJ: Collaborating to Diminish Smog and Improve Health in New Jersey

What was the problem/situation?

Exposures to air pollutants, including fine particles, ozone, and nitrogen oxides, are a concern to urban communities and public health officials in New Jersey. While New Jersey recently attained a significant milestone – for the first time attaining federal standards for fine particles, a type of pollutant that can seriously affect lung health – the state does not meet the federal Environmental Protection Agency’s National Ambient Air Quality Standard for ground-level ozone. This is due in large part to the large numbers of motor vehicles in the region.



Ozone in the upper atmosphere helps protect the Earth from harmful ultraviolet rays from the sun. But in the lower atmosphere, ozone is a respiratory irritant. It is caused by a chemical reaction between certain types of air pollutants, sunlight, and warm temperatures. Ozone is most prevalent in warmer months. Motor vehicles contribute more than half of the pollutants that create ozone pollution. People with respiratory conditions need to take precautions, such as staying indoors and limiting outdoor exercise, when ozone alerts are issued.

How was Tracking involved?

Over the years, NJ’s Environmental Public Tracking Program has worked with the NJ Clean Air Council and the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) to help get the word out about how to reduce exposures to air pollution among vulnerable populations. Richard Opiekun (NJ Tracking Data Coordinator) collaborated on the design of the 2015 Clean Air NJ campaign and brochures in his role as Vice-Chairman

of the NJ Clean Air Council. The NJ Clean Air Council (NJCAC) is an independent council which serves in an advisory capacity to make recommendations to the NJDEP regarding air matters. The NJCAC consists of sixteen members, including representatives of NJDOH, the NJ Department of Agriculture, the NJ Department of Community Affairs, the NJ Economic Development Authority, and NJ AFL-CIO, the NJ Chamber of Commerce, the NJ League of Municipalities, and five representatives from the general public.

What action was taken to resolve the problem?

The NJDEP and the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) began a public outreach campaign titled “Clean Air NJ” on March 4, 2015. The Clean Air NJ campaign is intended to educate the public about NJ’s most persistent air pollution problem, ground-level ozone (also known as smog), and the role of the public in reducing the emissions that cause smog. The campaign includes a website, NJDEP press release, 3 brochures aimed at different audiences (general public, people who commute by car, and children), and was featured on the main State of New Jersey and NJDEP website landing pages during March 2015. The Clean Air NJ website provides information about smog formation and its impacts on health and the environment; tips for the public to reduce their contribution to smog formation; information on what to do to protect your health on days with high ozone concentrations; directions on how to get daily smog alerts; links to more specific information and outreach brochures specifically created for the campaign; and information on how to sign up for the “Clean Air NJ” listserv.



NJSHAD serves as the main data portal for NJDOH, providing public access to data and information from the entire New Jersey Department of Health, and hosts datasets for the New Jersey Environmental Public Health Tracking (NJEPT) Program. NJSHAD provides static public health indicators which combine data and information, and dynamic custom public health query tools. The functionality, content, and utility of NJSHAD and the NJEPT portal are constantly being enhanced.