



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Health Department Announces Air Quality Flag Program

PITTSBURGH – The Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) announced today that it has adopted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Air Quality Flag Program, and will begin flying daily pennants at the Clack Health Complex in Lawrenceville. The program helps educate the public about current air quality conditions and No Burn Days in Allegheny County by flying different colored pennants. Residents can also receive notifications by signing up for the Allegheny Alerts program at selecting the Air Quality Action Days/No Burn Days notifications at www.alleghenycounty.us/alerts.

The Air Quality Flag Program began as a way for schools across the nation to learn about air quality and the Air Quality Index (AQI) by flying pennants that match the current air quality conditions of the region. The AQI translates current air pollution levels into six different colors, each representing higher levels of pollution. The AQI begins at green, or “good,” and as air pollution levels increase changes to yellow, then orange, red, purple, and finally, maroon. Days that are orange or higher are considered “Air Quality Action Days.” Higher levels of air pollution increase the chances of negative health effects in the public. Sensitive populations, such as those with respiratory or cardiovascular illnesses, are the most at risk. On Action Days, residents and businesses are encouraged to do their part to reduce air pollution emissions. The Air Quality Flag Program has recently been adopted by organizations and companies beyond schools.

ACHD also recently passed new regulations pertaining to open burning, which included the creation of No Burn Days, or days on which open burning is prohibited in Allegheny County. No Burn Days are called on every Air Quality Action Day. Open-air fires, such as camp fires or bonfires, are not allowed within Allegheny County on Action Days.

Wood burning contributes to high levels of fine particulate pollution in our region. People with heart or lung diseases, children and older adults are the most likely to be affected by fine particle pollution exposure. Wood smoke also contains numerous air toxics, pollutants that are known or suspected to cause cancer or other serious health effects, such as reproductive effects or birth defects, or adverse environmental effects.

By participating in the Air Quality Flag Program, ACHD hopes to spread knowledge about current air quality conditions, the AQI, and No Burn Days. Schools and organizations interested in participating in the flag program can visit www.airnow.gov/flag to learn more. More information on the new Open Burning regulation can be found online at www.achd.net/air/burningcentral/.

“We all have a stake in our environment and in our communities. Reducing air pollution and being mindful of the health and wellbeing of your family and neighbors can begin in your own back yard,” said Jim Thompson, the Health Department’s Deputy Director of Environmental Health.

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