

Ozone: The Good, The Bad and the Consequences

(Narrator)

Ozone forms naturally in the Earth's upper atmosphere. Up high, it protects us from the sun's damaging ultraviolet rays. At ground level, ozone harms living things, including humans; damages vegetation; and reduces crop production. Ozone is not directly emitted into the air. It is created by chemical reactions between volatile organic compounds, or VOCs, and Nitrogen Oxides in the presence of heat and sunlight. Cars are the main source of Nitrogen Oxides and VOCs, but other sources, such as power plants and household items like paint can contribute to higher ozone levels. Not only is too much ozone at ground level bad for the environment, it is bad for our health. The health effects of ozone include reduced lung function, complications with asthma and bronchitis, and coughing, wheezing and chest pain in otherwise healthy people.

The Environmental Protection Agency sets standards for each area of the country to protect citizens from the harmful effects of ground-level ozone, and Sedgwick County is in danger of exceeding the EPA's ozone standard. If Sedgwick County exceeds this standard, financial implications could apply. Other communities have experienced changes such as reformulated gasoline, which is more expensive; mandatory emissions testing for personal vehicles; more stringent controls on business emissions that may discourage new businesses from moving to the area; and more stringent requirements for road construction projects that could make them more costly. What does this mean for the average citizen?

It means it's time to make some changes to our daily activities that will have a positive impact on our environment and our health. So, how do we begin to make these necessary changes? Repair leaky air conditioning units (don't just refill them). Be sure air conditioning technicians are certified to recover refrigerant. Fill your gas tank after 6 p.m. and stop at the "click". Reduce overall driving by carpooling, walking and biking. Set thermostats a couple degrees higher in the summer. Don't spill gasoline when filling lawn equipment, or better yet, use no-spill containers like these. Keep lawn equipment properly tuned and mow the lawn after 6 p.m. These small changes can help Sedgwick County improve the environment and the health of our citizens.

For more information about ozone levels and other environmental issues, contact Sedgwick County Environmental Resources at 660-7200.