

## State officials warn of 'orange' level ozone dangers

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For the second day in a row, state health officials say ground-level ozone in the Upstate is at dangerous levels for people prone to respiratory problems.

Tuesday's "orange" ground-level ozone classification for Abbeville, Anderson, Cherokee, Greenville, Greenwood, Laurens, Oconee, Pickens, Spartanburg and Union counties was the first of the season. Today, both Upstate and Central Midlands counties received "orange" forecasts from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control.



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Orange-level ozone forecasts mean air is unhealthy for sensitive groups, like children, the elderly and people with chronic respiratory issues. It's the mid-point on a five-tier scale that ranges from "good" to "very unhealthy."

"When we get to orange levels, we want the general population to be aware of what the effects could be," said Jack Porter, environmental health manager with SCDHEC.

Elevated ground-level ozone ratings can have some impact on healthy adults exposed to the elements, Porter said, but children, seniors and people with pre-existing lung disease, like chronic bronchitis, emphysema and asthma are particularly vulnerable. These groups are advised to stay indoors as much as possible on days with high ground-level ozone levels. Symptoms of exposure include shortness of breath, wheezing and coughing.

Ground-level ozone is different from the ozone that occurs miles above the earth's surface in that it is created by chemical reactions when pollutants (both naturally-occurring and from industry or mobile emissions) react with one another in sunlight. These ozone levels rise on hot, sunny days with little to no wind to disperse pollutants.

"On high ozone days people need to take notice and not do a lot of strenuous outdoor exercise and increase their exposure," said June Deen, director of advocacy for American Lung Association in South Carolina. "... It bodes well for you to be careful on high ozone days."

A 2011 "State of the Air" report from the ALA gives Spartanburg County the highest average for the number of high ozone days from 2007 to 2009 in the state. Deen said a combination of man-made and natural effects on air quality contribute to the report's rankings. Areas further from coastal winds and at higher elevations hold stagnant air longer. Vehicle and industry emissions also play a part.

Dr. Robin Go, an allergist with CMA Allergy in Spartanburg's North Grove Medical Park said the time of the year when high ozone levels persist coincides with allergy season. Many times symptoms are similar, Go said.

"For some, the heat itself is just irritating, and for others, the pollution serves as an irritant," Go said. "You have more trouble breathing, coughing, etc. You feel like you cannot get enough air in."

Go advised people in areas with high ground-level ozone ratings to stay hydrated and limit time outdoors.

"I think people need to be sensible about this and not be too cavalier," Go said. "We've seen people suddenly collapsing from staying in the sun too long."

The Spartanburg Area Chamber of Commerce, the Spartanburg Development Association, Upstate Forever and Spartanburg County government are collaborating on an effort called "The Air We Breath" to reduce ground-level ozone and other forms of air pollution in Spartanburg County. Angela Viney, director of Upstate Forever's Spartanburg office, said today's elevated ozone level is an effect of pollution everyone can work to change.

"Don't mow the lawn before 6 p.m.," Viney said. "Don't fill up your tank before the evening hours, until the sun is down. If everybody took action on these days and tried to carpool, brought their lunch or walked to work instead of getting in your car. ... All these little things add up. It's a continuing education effort. Everyone can make a difference."

To check the daily ozone forecasts, visit [scdhec.gov/ozone](http://scdhec.gov/ozone).