



Illinois Environmental Protection Agency

2520 West Iles Avenue • P.O. Box 19276 • Springfield, Illinois • 62794-9276 • 217-782-3397

JB Pritzker, Governor

James Jennings, Director

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

July 14, 2026

CONTACT:

Kim.Biggs@illinois.gov (IEPA)

James.Leach@illinois.gov (IDPH)

Matthew.Mata@illinois.gov (IDPH)

Air Pollution Action Day Extended with Wildfire Smoke Potential to Impact Illinois

Residents Encouraged to Monitor Air Quality, Protect Public Health

SPRINGFIELD – The Chicago region is currently under an Air Pollution Action Day alert for ground-level ozone. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (Illinois EPA) and Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) are reminding all Illinois residents to take into consideration each day's daily air quality index to protect their health. This is especially pertinent at a time when North America is seeing increased wildfire intensity and frequency, and the smoke from these fires travel across the continent impacting more than the region of origin.

Currently ground-level ozone is forecasted to be Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (USG) for Chicago Area Air Quality Index (AQI) forecast sectors for today July 14th and for Wednesday July 15th. Additionally, current modeling is indicating the potential for wildfire smoke reaching parts of northern Illinois by Thursday, July 16th. Surface smoke may reach northeastern Illinois by early Thursday and gradually expand from the Chicago region towards Rockford and surrounding areas throughout the day. Daily AQI PM_{2.5} forecasts for these areas are set at Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups (USG) for PM_{2.5} for Thursday. There is also potential for smoke that negatively impacts air quality to linger in parts of Illinois Friday and into the weekend. Areas impacted will routinely be assessed and AQI forecasts will be revised as needed.

Illinois officials want to ensure residents take precautions to protect their health and limit exposure when air quality conditions decline. The Illinois EPA issues daily air quality forecasts, based on the federal AQI and posts the information at www.airnow.gov. The AQI is a color-coded system that classifies air quality from Good (Green) to Hazardous (Maroon). In addition to the AirNow.gov website, residents can subscribe to FREE air quality forecasts and alerts through the [EnviroFlash](#) program and download the Free **AIRNow App** for iPhone and Android phones: [iPhone App](#) | [Android App](#).

“We recommend residents get into the habit of checking the daily Air Quality Index at the same time you check the weather each morning, especially if you are part of a sensitive group such as having asthma or another lung disease” **said Illinois EPA Director James M. Jennings.** “You have information available at your fingertips via [AirNow.gov](https://airnow.gov) and the AIRNow app that can help you plan your daily activities.”

Wildfire smoke can travel long distances, and Illinois air quality can be impacted by fires located hundreds of miles away. The U.S. EPA has developed [wildfire guide factsheets](#) to increase understanding of the effects of these wildfires, even including a fact sheet on [how to protect your pets from wildfire smoke](#). [Activity guides](#) are also available that outline suggested actions to take to mitigate the effects of any unhealthy air quality days, including one for educators and parents detailing [how to safely let students and children](#) interact with the environment. Illinois officials have also established Illinois-specific guidelines for issuing air quality messages statewide to the public and to provide additional guidance for public health measures.

Air Pollution Action Days are days of elevated air quality that pose unhealthy threats to sensitive groups and advise everyone to make accommodations to reduce outside activity. Action Days are a call to action for residents to protect their health and for residents and businesses to reduce local contributions to air pollution. These alerts are issued the afternoon prior and run until the end of the next day. Conditions that will trigger an Air Pollution Action Day/National Weather Service Air Quality Alert* are:

- **Chicago Air Pollution Action Day** = Air quality is forecasted to be at or above the Orange or “Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups” category of the AQI for two or more consecutive days for the **Chicago Metropolitan Area (Cook and surrounding counties).**
- **Statewide/Areawide Air Pollution Action Day** = Air quality is forecasted to be at or above the Orange or “Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups” category on the AQI either **Statewide** or **in nearly all Illinois sectors.**
- **Red Air Pollution Action Day** - Air quality is forecasted to be at or above the Red or “Unhealthy” category on the AQI for any sector in Illinois.

Residents with respiratory and pulmonary disorders, children, older adults, and anyone who is active outdoors are most at risk due to elevated air pollution. Sensitive individuals should follow their doctor’s advice. Symptoms worth your attention include wheezing, coughing, elevated heart rate, tiredness, chest pain, and shortness of breath. If symptoms worsen, you should call your physician or 911.

All residents should keep cool and limit physical activity outdoors when air quality is unhealthy (Red) according to the Air Quality Index. Illinois residents are also encouraged to take the following actions to protect themselves when air quality is unhealthy:

- Stay indoors and monitor your breathing, especially if you have heart or lung disease, and keep windows and doors closed.
- If your air conditioner has a fresh air intake, set your system to recirculate or close the intake.
- Use high efficiency filters in air conditioning systems and portable air cleaners.
- Avoid activities that create more particulate matter indoors, like smoking or burning candles.
- If you cannot avoid working or other outdoor activities, then choose shorter or less intense activities, consider rescheduling if possible, and take more frequent breaks.
- Consider wearing a high-quality N-95 or N-100 mask to filter damaging particles while outdoors.

Note: NowCast AQI readings may show categories higher than the daily forecast to help identify periods of higher 1-hour PM_{2.5}/smoke. For a description of the differences between daily AQI forecasts and NowCast AQI, visit <https://www.airnow.gov/aqi/aqi-basics/using-air-quality-index/>. Those with air quality concerns or outdoor plans can check current NowCast readings or sign up for EnviroFlash alerts on [AirNow.gov](https://www.airnow.gov/).

Additional information is also available on the [Illinois EPA website](#) and the [IDPH website](#).

###