TOOLS to communicate air quality in Michigan

Michigan DEQ Air Quality Division
Michigan’s Air Quality

Air “measurements” in Michigan are usually pretty good ... but not always where they need to be to protect everyone’s health when “hammered” by an air episode.
EnviroFlash is an Air Quality Index (AQI) tool that automatically sends a forecast notice to subscribers at a level they select.
EnviroFlash “Protects”

The benefit is to communicate potential air quality concerns in a timely manner ... especially to “protect” the health of sensitive groups such as children, asthmatics, people with heart disease, & people that work/exercise strenuously outdoors.
Why Michigan Participates

Even with a “clipped” budget and staff, EnviroFlash has allowed the DEQ to get timely air information directly to the public at low cost!

DEQ staff time and program expenses are fairly low.
“Building” on Ozone Action!

Ozone Action! is Michigan’s most successful air outreach program.

The EnviroFlash message adds the convenience of receiving automated information at self-selected levels. Each ozone message also includes an Action! day notice, thus “builds” onto an existing, well known program.

Clean Air Coalitions reported that summer 2005 was easy in part because the Action! day notice was delivered via EnviroFlash.
Urging “Caution”

When people know the daily AQI color forecast, they can make choices to reduce their exposure and to reduce air emissions. They can:

- **PROTECT HEALTH** by reducing strenuous/prolonged exertion when poor air quality is expected.

- **TAKE ACTION!** to reduce air pollution levels by driving less, using energy efficient products, and by opting not to burn.
Here’s the “Drill”...

Michigan Forecast Areas

1. Eastern UP
2. Traverse City
3. Ludington
4. Grand Rapids
5. Benton Harbor
6. Kalamazoo
7. Lansing
8. Houghton Lake
9. Saginaw
10. Flint
11. Ann Arbor
12. Detroit
Choose a Color - Example Notifications

**Subject: Air quality forecast for Detroit, MI**

Air Quality Forecast:

Wednesday, February 2
Particle Pollution (2.5 microns) - Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups

Regional air quality maps are available at: [http://www.epa.gov/airnow](http://www.epa.gov/airnow)

Information concerning the air quality forecast, current air quality data and information is available at: [michigan.gov/degair](http://michigan.gov/degair)

This message was issued by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality on Wednesday, February 2.

The information provided is provided via a partnership of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Msg From: epacdx@csc.com
(Air quality forecast for Detroit)
Detroit: 2/3 forecast for Particle Pollution (2.5 microns) is Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups.
Most People “Pick” Orange

Breakdown of Forecast Level Request

- Good
- Moderate
- Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups
- Unhealthy
- Very Unhealthy
- Hazardous
- Action Days Only

2006 EnviroFlash Program
It’s Not a Perfect System
Some of the “Vices” …

- **MONITOR VALUES DON’T ALWAYS MATCH FORECAST:**
  Forecasts are based on expected values for regional monitors, not source-impacted monitors.

- **FEW BAD AIR DAYS TO TEST:**
  The program is not well tested during periods of elevated pollution levels.

- **“HUH?” FACTOR:**
  Public is confused between the AQI forecast and actual monitor data; and between NAAQS (federal health standards) and the AQI which is a daily health indicator.

- **ON-LINE MAP ERRORS:**
  Since the AQI shows raw data which is not yet quality assured, a “bad” value is occasionally displayed.
I’ll “Level” With You ..

MESSAGE CLARIFICATION. WE TRY TO ...

- Stress what “Actions!” reduce air emissions and what Actions! protect health.

- Ensure that the health message is “reduce exertion”, not “don’t exercise”. When air is unhealthy, try a light jog instead of a run; Rotate players frequently in sports/games, etc.

Reduce prolonged physical exertion when air quality is poor. Follow the AQI health guidelines.
The “Wrenching” Truth

Unfortunately, many in Michigan:

- Are not familiar with the AQI. Nor does the public understand the difference between the national air standards (NAAQS) and the daily AQI health indicator.

- Are not enrolled. Enrollment has not increased as quickly as we’d like. More rigorous marketing is needed.

- Are confused. Recent news stories have implied our state has more air pollution than we actually do. Air monitor web problems complicated the DEQ’s ability to clearly communicate about air issues. System improvements have resolved this.
Marketing EnviroFlash
One “step” at a time…

- Promote EF through the new MIair real-time data option on DEQ “AIR” webpage.
- Partner with Asthma Initiative of Michigan and local Asthma Programs.
- Michigan AARP newsletter article.
- Promote the AQI and EF with each news reporter contact.
- Outreach to schools for recess and sports programs.
- Continue to work with local health departments, community groups, local clean air coalitions, tribes and others to multiply the message across the state.
Additional Option to EnviroFlash Service

Michigan DEQ has added the EF option to also sign-up to receive UV Radiation notices. This option is offered as a public service to Michigan residents.

It is provided in partnership with the American Cancer Society and State of Michigan (Depts. of Education, Community Health, and Environmental Quality).

When UV levels are high:
- Avoid sun when.
- Cover skin with clothing & use UVA & B sunscreen.
- Wear a hat and sunglasses.
“Axing” For Help To Grow EnviroFlash

The sole purpose of EnviroFlash is to provide information that helps people make good choices when conditions are expected to be poor. Michigan DEQ wants to engage partners to help us market the program.

Constructive ideas how we can improve to provide better information are welcome.

THANK YOU