



For immediate release:
Monday, April 13, 2009

Contact: Jerome Hand
(334) 260-4500

ADEM to Resume Air Quality Forecasting in Birmingham

MONTGOMERY – On April 15, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management will resume issuing air quality forecasts for the greater Birmingham area. The Department has provided air quality forecasts for over a decade and ADEM meteorologists will again provide these daily forecasts throughout the spring and early fall. The forecasts are designed to help the Birmingham area achieve and maintain compliance with the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for ozone and to also allow citizens to make informed decisions about their daily outdoor activities.

The Environmental Protection Agency took action last year to tighten the NAAQS for ground-level ozone, implementing a more stringent standard based on new scientific evidence about ozone and its effects on public health and the environment. Specifically, EPA revised the 8 hour ozone standard from 84 parts per billion to 75 parts per billion. Additionally, EPA revised the breakpoints of ozone levels which represent specific health effects. These breakpoints form the Air Quality Index (AQI) and are the basis for the ADEM air quality forecasts. Additional information on the new ozone standard can be obtained at www.epa.gov/groundlevelozone.

“The Department’s mission is to assure that all citizens are afforded a safe and healthful environment, and the protection of air quality in Alabama is a central component of that mission,” said ADEM Director Trey Glenn. “The air quality forecasts allow the citizens to make informed decisions concerning their daily activities and provide citizens a chance to be proactive in protecting the air quality in their communities.”

ADEM prepares the forecasts by evaluating real time air quality data provided by the Jefferson County Department of Health (JCDH) and by assessing weather patterns, evaluating computer models, and observing climate trends. The forecasts are issued jointly by JCDH and ADEM. Forecasts will be issued Sunday through Friday to provide a prediction of the ozone levels for the following day. The forecasts issued on Friday will cover the following two or three days. Also, the forecasts consist of color-coded categories based on the AQI that reflect expected ozone levels and recommend actions for the general public. Forecasts are provided to the local news media and are also available at www.adem.alabama.gov

If necessary, air quality “Alerts” will be issued when conditions favor the development of air pollutant concentrations that meet or surpass the national standards. Alerts inform the public about recommended changes in daily activities to help reduce health impacts. The alerts are especially helpful to sensitive groups such as young children, the elderly, or individuals with respiratory problems.

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ADEM encourages voluntary efforts, and offers helpful information, to help reduce concentrations of ground-level ozone. These voluntary efforts include operating outdoor power equipment less frequently, utilizing public transportation, carpooling, converting to compact florescent lights, and using energy-efficient appliances.

Forecasts can be received directly via email through the EPA EnviroFlash program which allows citizens to customize their forecasts, free of charge. Additional information on how to sign up for EnviroFlash can be found at www.enviroflash.info/.

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