

*Clearing the air is complicated task The Courier-Journal (Louisville, Kentucky) July 31, 2008  
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**BODY:**

Weather, tighter standards,

fuel costs help cut pollution

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{ }The Courier-Journal

Don't tell Ardella "Ducky" Gaines that the air has improved this summer.

A blanket of haze forced the 75-year-old Louisville resident, who suffers from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, commonly called COPD, inside earlier this week.

"It just takes your breath away, and I don't have much breath anyway," she said.

Even as Louisville has exceeded tougher new smog and soot standards on several days this summer , the air quality has generally been better this year.

Still, the worst of the pollution season is yet to come. Higher energy costs and a slumping economy have reduced the amount of pollution generated by drivers and industry, who are reining in to cut costs. Better weather also is a factor in improved air quality readings .

Lung-burning ozone - which increases when emissions of volatile organic compounds and

nitrogen oxides react with intense sunlight on hot, still days - also has been running at lower levels than last year, the Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control District says.

The same can be said for fine- particle pollution - a mix of tiny bits of soot, liquids and solids that get into people's lungs and blood, and can trigger heart attacks.

June readings for fine- particle pollution were the lowest for that month since at least 1999. Matt Stull, a district spokesman, said July readings are expected to be low as well.

#### { }Pollution's effects

Despite those improvements, tougher fine- particle standards that went into effect in 2006 and a more stringent ozone standard that took effect four months ago mean officials are still issuing unhealthy-air warnings.

The region's polluted summer air affects many with lung ailments, said Dr. Frances Weinstock, whose family practice includes patients with asthma and COPD. "The irritation ... makes their lungs more reactive to the ozone and (they) are less efficient with their breathing."

She said more complex medicines can help, and that many patients have begun asking for them.

But heavy rains that produced flooding in Indiana and the Midwest earlier this summer also scrubbed the air, Stull said. And there has not yet been a prolonged heat wave like the one that made last summer the second hottest in Louisville's recorded history.

In addition, the jet stream - a narrow band of strong, high-altitude wind - often has been positioned to push cleaner air into the area from the north , Stull said.

Bruce Traugher, the city's economic development director and acting air pollution chief, told the Louisville Metro Air Pollution Board earlier this month that factors such as higher gas prices and manufacturing cutbacks were also likely playing a role in suppressing air pollution.

But any air-quality improvements this year will not likely be enough to prevent a second consecutive year of Clean Air Act violations, officials said. And last year Louisville piled on many of its worst air pollution days during August and September.

#### { }Driving less

In Jefferson County alone, cars, trucks and other motor vehicles have been responsible for about 31 percent of the pollution that contributes to ozone. Industrial plants are responsible for about 40 percent. And that's not counting emissions from power plants that supply electricity to industry.

Traugher noted that people are driving less - down about 5 percent over a year ago in both Kentucky and Indiana, according to the U.S. Department of Transportation. That means fewer tailpipe emissions.

One who's driving less is Heidi Peele, who commutes from Shepherdsville to downtown Louisville for her job as a legal assistant. She started taking **TARC buses** largely to save more than \$100 a week in gas and parking - money that she needs for her grocery bills.

But she said she also recognizes the air quality benefits of taking the bus. Tuesday's haze, she said, was " like fog, but it wasn't fog. "

**TARC ridership has increased at least 5 percent over the past year and, on some key express commuter routes, ridership increases ranged from 33 percent to 111 percent.**

Brian Elstner , a Highlands resident, is riding a bike to work downtown on most days. The information technology professional pedals his nearly 2-year-old son to a downtown day-care center , then rides to his office at the Aegon tower.

Elstner, who moved to Louisville from Chicago, said he made an environmental decision to avoid buying a second car for his family and to burn less gas.

"In Chicago, there was a lot of bike awareness," he said. "Here, I feel I can do my part to raise bike awareness."

{ }Industry demand down

Because of the economic downturn, LG&E reports a 2 percent drop in industrial electricity demand throughout its service area compared to last year, said spokeswoman Chris Whelan.

The utility's two Louisville coal-fired power plants also have reduced emissions, she said.

Whelan said the closure of DuPont Performance Elastomers, which sent its work to the company's plant in Louisiana, cost the area more than 200 jobs. But it also means losing the approximately 500,000 pounds of direct emissions that the plant produced each year.

Whelan said production cutbacks at Ford Motor's assembly plants, as well as General Electric's Appliance Park, weakened electricity sales.

At Ford's Louisville Assembly Plant, workers now labor one week on, one week off, and work just one shift . At the Kentucky Truck Plant, work has been scaled back from three shifts to two .

Tommy Spires , who represents more than 2,000 Appliance Park workers with IUE-CWA Local 761, said GE stresses efficiency.

"Everybody is getting more energy conscious , especially with gasoline prices," he said.

It's typical for air quality to improve in a slow economy because people spend less on goods and services, said John Whitehead , an Appalachian State University environmental economics professor.

As a result, there's less energy demand.

"That means less emissions," he said.

Reporter James Bruggers can be reached at (502) 582-4645.

TARC ridership

Up at least 5 percent overall this year, with the increase in commuter express routes ranging from 33 percent to 111 percent.

LG&E

Overall electricity demand down 1.3 percent; industrial demand down 2 percent.

LG&E

Jefferson County power-plant emissions of nitrogen oxides down 3.3 percent over last year.

Kentucky vehicle miles traveled

Down 5.1 percent over last year.

Indiana vehicle miles traveled

Down 5.3 percent.

SOURCES Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control District (ozone days)

TARC for TARC data

E.On U.S. for LG&E data

INFORMATIONAL GRAPHIC: FINE-PARTICLE POLLUTION AND DAYS ABOVE THE FEDERAL OZONE STANDARD BY STEVE DURBIN; THE COURIER-JOURNAL (SEE LIBRARY MICROFILM OR PDF PAGES)

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