

# Dept. of Natural Resources: What 50 years of clean air looks like

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**MADISON, Wis.** – When you take a breath outside in Wisconsin, you are breathing the cleanest air the state has seen in 50 years. Not only is May Clean Air Month, this year is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Clean Air Act.

Passed in 1970, the Clean Air Act is a landmark piece of environmental legislation largely responsible for the quality of the air we breathe today. Since its enactment 50 years ago, the combined emissions of six common pollutants have fallen by 73%. The Clean Air Act is one of the most comprehensive air quality laws in the world. The act has achieved tremendous reductions in air pollution, protecting public health and saving lives, while allowing for economic growth and development.

To help educate the public on where ozone pollution comes from, what the Department of Natural Resources is doing to regulate ozone, and what Wisconsinites can do to help the air we breathe, the DNR released [Committed to Clean Air: Ozone Pollution](#) on YouTube. The video completes the Air Program's three-part video series. Videos *Committed to Clean Air* and *Committed to Clean Air: Particle Pollution* are available on DNR's YouTube channel. The Air Program is also featured in the "Earth Day at 50" issue of *Natural Resources* magazine.

"Clean Air Month gives DNR the opportunity to shine a light on the accomplishments the state's air has seen. Fifty years ago today, the air was nowhere near as clean or clear as it is today," said Gail Good, the DNR's Air Program Director. "Today's positive air quality story is a direct result of a combination of federal regulation, state enforcement and action, and voluntary actions by businesses and citizens."

The DNR is responsible for ensuring the regulations in the Clean Air Act are followed

throughout the state. The Air Program continuously works at this process and improving the quality, consistency and efficiency of the air permitting and compliance process, air quality planning and monitoring as well as communications. Program efforts also address climate change and implement Governor Tony Evers' Executive Order #52, which calls for the development of strategies to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Recent Air Program efforts include:

- **Mobile Air Monitoring Lab (MAML)** – The Air Program deployed the MAML for the first time in 2019. The state-of-the-art mobile lab has extensive monitoring capabilities including a 10 meter meteorological tower, a suite of continuous criteria pollutant analyzers and a volatile organic compound (VOC) instrument. MAML monitoring data is captured with a goal of informing primary pollutant contribution to ozone formation. . The mobility of the lab allows the program to place it in strategic locations during Wisconsin's ozone season. From May through October of 2019, the MAML spent time monitoring ozone in Kenosha and Milwaukee counties. The MAML will spend 2020 monitoring ozone in Sheboygan County.
- **Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)** – DNR launched a task force to explore PFAS compounds and their impacts. PFAS are a large group of human-made chemicals used in industry and consumer products worldwide since the 1950s. Exposure to certain PFAS compounds may increase the risk of adverse health effects. There are currently no federally approved sampling methods for PFAS compounds in ambient air. The Air Program is currently collaborating with the Wisconsin State Lab of Hygiene on PFAS monitoring method development, and is working with other states on the matter.
- **Air Quality Trends** – The program once again released the annual Air Quality Trends report. The report includes air monitoring data through 2018 and shows overall air quality in Wisconsin continues to improve, building on a 20-year trend in the state. Success stories include the 50 percent drop in emissions of ozone-forming pollutants like volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and nitrogen oxides (NOx) and a 68 percent drop in sulfur dioxide emissions since the early 2000s. For the first time, this report also includes maps of NO<sub>2</sub> derived from National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) satellite data collected from 2006-2018. Satellite data observed large reductions of NO<sub>2</sub> across most of the state, with the greatest reductions found in the Milwaukee area. This is consistent with the decreases in NO<sub>2</sub> observed by the

state's ground-based monitors and indicates that the reduction of this ozone-forming pollutant is widespread.

- **Clean Diesel Grants** – The program awarded more than \$750,000 to nearly 40 projects aimed at improving Wisconsin's air quality and addressing climate change. The projects include replacement or upgrade of older, higher-emitting diesel engines on school buses and construction equipment across the state with newer, cleaner technologies. One project funds the purchase of zero-emission lawn mowers in the City of Eau Claire to replace aging diesel equipment.
- **e-Signature** – The growth of the department's first U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved e-Signature reporting option for facilities in Wisconsin. E-Signature provides facilities the option of reporting, submitting and signing Air Program compliance and monitoring reports electronically to DNR. Since e-signature was implemented, 414 distinct facilities have e-signed documents.. DNR expanded the e-Signature program this past year and it is now being used by DNR's Waste Program as well.
- **Permit tracking bar** – The Air Program added a new progress bar in the Permit Search Tool to make permit tracking easier for facilities and the public. As each step of the permit application review process is completed, a section of the progress bar is filled in. The progress bar serves as an easier, more visual way of tracking a permit's progress.

Visit [DNR's Clean Air Month](#) webpage for links to resources and more information.