

# Northeast region is choking on 'thickest smog in years'

By JEFF DONN  
Associated Press Writer

SPRINGFIELD, Mass. — With late-summer swelter still possible, much of the Northeast is panting and heaving through its thickest smog in years, air quality monitors say.

In Connecticut, the smog has been at its worst since 1993. In Maryland, any more hot and stagnant weather will also likely yield that state's highest levels in years.

Environmental regulators blame the 1997 Summer of Smog on quirks of the annual weather cycle.

They say hot, still, sunny weather conspired with the position of the jet stream to produce exceptional conditions for making ozone — popularly called smog.

"It's kind of like we got hit in the bull's-eye," said Paul Miller, a policy analyst for the Northeast States for Coordinated Air Use Management, set up by government health officials around the Northeast.

Smog forms when sunlight cooks chemicals released into the air largely by cars and factories.

It is found in the lowest slice of the atmosphere near the ground, not in the so-called ozone layer of the stratosphere.

Smog worsens asthma, allergies, and many lung ailments.

Children who play outside, adults who jog or work outside, and the elderly are especially susceptible.

Air quality monitors say this season's spiking smog provides a reminder that much of the Northeast still violates federal safety

standards for pollution, despite general improvement over the years.

They say it demonstrates the need for new smog-control efforts that are underway in some states.

The Northeast, from the northern section of Virginia to Maine, has strained under 24 smog days so far this year — with levels above the U.S. standard for at least one monitoring station, according to Miller.

The region's most recent peak years were 1995 with 25 smog days and 1993 with 38.

There were 60 in 1988 — an indication of the overall trend downward.

Some of the highest smog levels this summer were recorded in Connecticut, which includes part of the New York City metropolitan area, and Maryland, where commuters clog the highways between Baltimore and Washington.

In Connecticut, the 13 smog days so far is the highest since 1993, which had 15, according to regulators in that state. Maryland has 14 so far, equalling 1995, that state's monitors said.

The 16 smog days in 1993 set the record for the last five years.

Pharmacist Jeff Messina of the Fort Hill Pharmacy in Groton, Conn., said he has noticed a considerable increase of complaints this summer.

He said patients are complaining mostly about respiratory trouble.

He has been filling more prescriptions than usual and advising

some customers to stay indoors when possible.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the smog had a lot to do with it," he said.

The heavy smog season descended just as governments are pushing forward with several efforts to further curtail ozone in the Northeast.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will direct states next month to reduce smog-causing chemicals from utilities and factories.

Some Northeast states are pressing for stronger action, asking the EPA to clamp down directly on polluting power plants in the Midwest.

They say pollution from those utilities travels on the jet stream, adding to pollution in the Northeast.

"We generate some of our own problem," said John Brickley, director of the American Lung Association of Massachusetts.

"Then we also suffer some of the ... transport problem that comes from the Midwest."

Some states, including Massachusetts and Maryland, are adopting more advanced methods to test car emissions.

Quentin Banks, a spokesman for the Maryland Department of the Environment, said a new, more accurate, treadmill device will replace the tailpipe check on Oct. 1 in that state.

"The cars coming out of Detroit are less polluting. By the same token ... there are more cars out on the road, and they're driving farther," he said.

## Altoona abuzz about the arrival of '60 Minutes' newsman Ed Bradley

ALTOONA, Pa. (AP) — A radio station announced the motel he was staying in.

A television station tracked down a waitress at the deli where he noshed a bagel.

The newspaper found him spooning down chili in a hoagie shop.

Television correspondent Ed Bradley and his "60 Minutes" crew had planned to slip quietly into Altoona, spend three days reporting their story and leave.

It didn't happen that way.

"Some radio station was offering movie tickets to the person who could find Ed Bradley. In restaurants, people were kind of pointing at him. He gets his picture on top of page one at the Altoona Mirror,"

CBS cameraman Bill Cassara said yesterday as he packed his gear to leave town.

Bradley came to delve into the case of Dennis and Lorie Nixon, a couple sentenced to prison last spring for relying on faith-healing while their teenage daughter died of diabetes.

"But the '60 Minutes' correspondent becomes bigger than the story he's doing," said Bradley's sound man, Everett Wong.

Rich Dennis, a morning show host for radio station WVAM-AM, took a station van on a fruitless, two-hour search for the correspondent.

"It probably seemed like I was stalking," he admitted. "But I'm a

huge fan of '60 Minutes' and Ed Bradley, and this was a quest."

Waitresses at two restaurants said customers badgered them for news of the newsman.

Even as Mayor Raphael Voltz fretted that the "60 Minutes" story might tarnish the image of this city 85 miles east of Pittsburgh, the Allegheny Mountains Convention and Visitors Bureau stuffed a T-shirt and locally-made Slinky into a gift bag for Bradley.

But Blair County District Attorney William Haberstroh failed to feel the euphoria.

"Maybe 20 years ago, I'd be a lot more excited," he said as he awaited an interview with Bradley. "Now, I'm not impressed."

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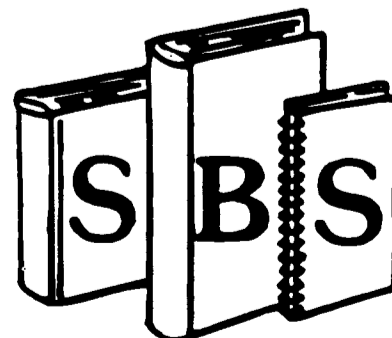


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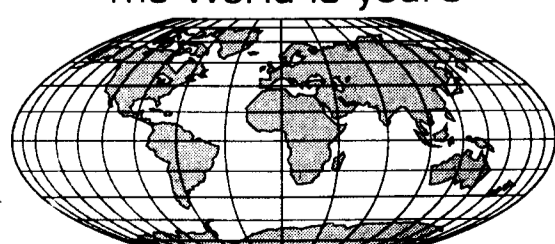
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