

# State presents ozone findings to city council

Rudy Herndon Moab Sun News | Posted: Thursday, January 15, 2015 8:00 am

Will Moab's air quality meet federal regulations aimed at reducing ground-level ozone pollution?

The answer to that question depends on the final standard that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) ultimately adopts.

As the agency mulls over several possible options, state regulators have come out with local monitoring data which suggest that the answer is currently up in the air.

The figures from a monitoring site at Grand County High School show that readings taken over a 77-day period from late July through mid-October would fall below existing ground-level ozone standards of 75 parts per billion.

However, state regulators acknowledge that they are missing one key data set – namely, information from the late spring and early summer months, when ground-level ozone concentrations in southeastern Utah tend to be at their highest.

Indeed, the 10 highest daily maximum concentrations at Canyonlands National Park over one representative period were all recorded before late July, according to Utah Division of Air Quality (DAQ) Monitoring Manager Bo Call.

“In the southern part (of the state) and more deserty areas, that happens more in May, June and July,” he told the Moab City Council Jan. 13.

Moab resident Bill Love sees a need to fill in the missing data.

“The problem is, (they have) not taken ozone readings during our high period,” Love said Jan. 14.

With more information at hand, he said, officials can act to address any problems that may exist.

According to Call, the EPA is expected to lower the federal standard from the current level to a range between 65 to 70 parts per billion, and there's a possibility that it could drop the acceptable limits down to 60 parts per billion.



## Utah Division of Air Quality Monitoring Manager Bo Call

Utah Division of Air Quality Monitoring Manager Bo Call presented the Moab City Council with the results from a local ground-level ozone monitoring site. [Photo by Rudy Herndon / Moab Sun News]

“I think that pretty much, Moab falls in the same boat as pretty much the rest of the state, in that it's going to be a challenge to meet a new standard of 65 (parts per billion),” he said.

If there's bad news, he said, it's that new standards have been proposed.

But Love sees any proposed reductions of ground-level ozone as a step in the right direction.

“To me, that's the good news, because I'm the one as an older person who's affected by ozone,” he said.

Ground-level ozone pollution can trigger a variety of health problems – especially among children, elderly residents and people of all ages who have asthma or other lung diseases.

The pollutant forms when nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds react in the presence of sunlight. (Once the sunlight disappears, the reaction reverses, and nitrogen oxides in the air will actually “scavenge” the ozone out, Call noted.)

According to the EPA, emissions from industrial facilities and electric utilities, motor vehicle exhaust, gasoline vapors and chemical solvents are among the major sources of both nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds.

The agency says that the country as a whole, excluding California, could save \$6.4 to \$13 billion annually in health-related costs by 2025 if the 70 parts-per-billion standard is adopted. That figure would climb to somewhere between \$19 to \$38 billion annually if the standard fell to 65 parts per billion, the agency estimates.

Neither Canyonlands nor Price met the current standards in 2012, when ozone levels at Canyonlands reached a high of 79 parts per billion.

But over the years, the results from those two sites have fluctuated.

During the most recent study period, the highest-recorded ozone concentrations were found in Moab, reaching 64 parts per billion on Aug. 9, 2014. Conversely, however, ozone concentrations in Price and at Canyonlands were significantly higher than local readings on many other days during the three-month timeframe – especially during September and October.

Call said there isn't much that city officials can do to reduce local levels.

“For the most part, unless you're actively pursuing projects to reduce emissions, your emissions are going to increase,” he said. “Every time there's a new car, a new house or a new building, that's all going to create emissions.”

However, he noted that new cars typically pollute less than older models, while the federal government controls vehicle emissions and gasoline formulations that will bear results down the road.

For now, at least, Moab City Council member Heila Ershadi is grateful that the data are out there for all to see.

“As a council person and as a mother, I’m very glad we have this information,” she said.

“The data indicates to me that we do need to keep an eye on ozone,” Ershadi said. “We learned from this study that Moab’s ozone level tends to be similar to Canyonlands, and that sometimes that level exceeds what is known to be safe.”

Locals and visitors alike should be informed when air quality might reach unhealthy levels, she said.

Now that some local information is available, Love is hoping that the city of Moab or the regional health department will seek state funding for more monitors to track levels of both ground-level ozone and particulate matter – another common air pollutant.

“That should be the next step,” he said. “The reason why it’s so important to get monitors is to see if we have a problem.”