do something!

for healthier air in Austin

contents

do something...

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about this guide

The more you know about air quality,

Every subject needs a textbook, and air quality is no exception. Austin's air pollution worries have grown with the city, and unhealthy levels of ozone now demand our attention. This guide answers many common questions about ozone, its formation and health effects. It also offers suggestions for reducing polluting activities in our daily lives. Reducing ozone will require all of us to work together — but first, we must understand more about ozone and what we can do to prevent it.

the more you care about improving it.

Our air quality is important for two main reasons: the government and your health. A surprising combination? Not really. As our air quality worsens, ozone poses a threat to public health. Violating federal ozone standards designed to protect the public health could result in mandatory clean-up measures and the loss of highway funding. We want to improve our air quality before that happens. It's the right thing to do — for Austin's future and yours.

We're here to help you

The City of Austin's Air Quality program is an outreach, policy and information resource for the citizens of Austin. We actively support regional efforts for healthier air — in fact, Central Texas was the first area in the nation to sign the historic O_3 Flex Agreement, committing to proactive and voluntary ozone reductions. The City's Air Quality program investigates ways for the City, as both a major employer and a service provider, to improve air quality. We provide information to citizens who are concerned about air quality and reach out to raise the level of general ozone awareness in our community. As part of the City's Transportation, Planning & Sustainability Department, the Air Quality program helps ensure that even as Austin grows, ours is "the most liveable community in the country."

do something.

Austin is famous for its citizens' commitment to the environment. We'll need every ounce of that commitment as we tackle our ozone problem and return to healthy, enjoyable air. Take the time to learn more about air quality issues. Challenge your own habits, and make changes where you can to improve air quality. Tell someone about the things you do to reduce ozone, and encourage friends and family to do their part for cleaner air. With your help, Austin can achieve healthy air.

ozone: the basics

What is ozone?

Ozone is an odorless, invisible atmospheric gas, sometimes written as its chemical symbol, O_3. It's formed by a chemical reaction between nitrogen oxides (NOx) and a group of chemicals called Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs). These "ozone precursors" combine in sunlight to form ozone.

Ozone: good or bad?

When we talk about ozone in an air quality sense, we're usually talking about ground-level ozone. That's the "bad" ozone that's formed from pollutants where we live and work. There is an ozone layer high in our atmosphere, sometimes called "good" ozone, which helps protect us from UV radiation. Some human activities can deplete this ozone layer, leading to the "holes" you may have heard about. Although these two types of ozone share the same chemical makeup, we can't use ground-level ozone to replace the protective ozone lost from our ozone layer. Confusing? Just remember the ozone rhyme: Good up high, bad nearby.

What's "ozone season"?

From April to October, conditions in Central Texas are more likely to form ozone. The heat of the summer increases the speed of the chemical reaction that creates ozone, and low winds and dry skies keep the ozone hovering in our immediate atmosphere. Ozone can form at any time, but April Fool's Day to Halloween is considered "ozone season" — when we're most likely to exceed the federal standards for healthy air.

Are you kidding? The weather's gorgeous!

That's the sneaky thing about ozone — it's odorless and invisible. Ozone is one of the main components of smog, but it can also exist without the particulate matter that makes a "hazy" sky. While a very hazy day often indicates a high ozone day, the reverse isn't necessarily true. It doesn't have to be hazy or smoggy for ozone levels to be in the danger zone.

What causes high ozone levels?

High levels of ozone occur under a complicated set of conditions. High temperatures, plenty of sunlight, and a lack of wind increase the likelihood that ozone will form. Independent events (like accidental fires or industrial releases) can also affect ozone levels, as can dramatic increases in on-road travel. High ozone can also be cumulative — once ozone levels begin to climb, it's likely that they will stay high until there's a change in the weather.

Doesn't it just blow in from other cities?

Sometimes, yes, air currents do carry pollution from other areas into our region. And many times, pollution that forms here is carried to other towns. Air quality models are careful to account for this transport — but they also show that our area generates plenty of ozone on its own. Since we can't stop the transport of pollutants from other cities, we need to take steps to reduce ozone here in Austin.

Who's responsible?

Unlike other areas in Texas, Austin doesn't have a large number of point sources (like factories with smokestacks) that can be blamed for our air pollution problem. In our case, pollution from cars and trucks is the leading contributor to ozone formation. We're all responsible for our ozone problem each time we start up our engines — but that also means we can all take responsibility for the solution.

Aren't there federal regulations on air quality?

Absolutely. And that's one of the reasons we're concerned with improving Austin's air quality. New federal regulations set an even higher standard for air quality, measuring ozone concentrations over an eight-hour period. Areas that routinely exceed the maximum ozone levels can be designated as "nonattainment" areas by the EPA. In addition to federal sanctions (which could affect transportation funding), that designation might hurt Austin's reputation as an outdoor-oriented town and a fun, healthy place to work and play. And if that isn't enough, remember that the federal standards were created for a reason — to protect the public health. When we exceed maximum ozone levels, we're breathing unhealthy air.

Why should I care about ozone?

Ozone affects all of us in two major ways: it poses dangers to our health and it could result in regulations that would restrict our behaviors and cost us money. EPA air quality standards apply to the Austin metropolitan region as a whole — Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis and Williamson counties. If any part of our area violates air quality standards, the whole area is subject to nonattainment designation. Since everyone in our five-county region would be affected, it's in our best interest to work together to maintain healthy air in Austin … and beyond.

ozone and health

Are high ozone levels really unhealthy?

Yes. The EPA sets federal standards for air pollutants according to health-based criteria. When we refer to "high" ozone levels, we mean levels near or above National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Ozone concentrations greater than 85 parts per billion (ppb) averaged over an eight-hour period, or greater than 125 ppb in any one hour exceed the federal standard.☐

Why is ozone bad for you?

Ozone irritates the lining of the lungs. It can aggravate respiratory conditions and make breathing more difficult. Children and athletes breathe at a faster rate, taking in more pollution than a sedentary adult, so they are often more easily affected by increased ozone levels. The long-term effects of ozone exposure are still uncertain, but studies are beginning to show that high ozone may be a cause of asthma.☐

Who's at risk?

Even healthy adults may feel the effects of elevated ozone, particularly while exercising. Some people are even more sensitive to the effects of ozone, especially the elderly, young children, asthma sufferers and those with diminished lung capacity due to respiratory disease. On high ozone days, it's recommended that these individuals avoid strenuous outdoor activity. ☐

Does this mean I have to stay indoors?

Not necessarily. Austin's air quality is better than in many American cities. However, excessive exposure to air pollution can affect public health, which is why steps to clean up the air now could prevent more serious health problems in the future. Immediate health effects are generally only noticed on high ozone days. Active persons or those with compromised respiratory functions may notice difficulty breathing when ozone levels are high. If you find yourself affected by high ozone levels, it's recommended that you limit your outdoor activity on Ozone Action Days.☐

Has any of this been proven?

Medical research links ozone to diminished lung capacity and increases in respiratory distress. In fact, some studies now show that ozone causes asthma. The American Lung Association has more information on the detrimental health effects of air pollution (**www.lungusa.org**). Studies have shown that:☐☐

- The closure of downtown streets during the Summer Olympics in Atlanta led to significant reductions in emergency care and hospitalizations for asthma in children ages 1 to 16.[1]☐
- West Point cadets experienced a decline in lung function during summer training camps, particularly in locations where ozone concentrations frequently exceeded 100 ppb.[2]☐
- Living four or more years in areas with high ozone led to diminished lung function and increased reports of respiratory symptoms in non-smoking Yale students.[3]☐
- Among children who play sports, those living in polluted cities were most likely to develop asthma.[4]☐☐

1 Friedman, et. al. "Impact of changes in transportation…on air quality and childhood asthma." Journal of the American Medical Association, Vol. 285, No. 7, pp. 897-905, 2001.

2 Kinney, P.L. and Lippmann, M. "Respiratory effects of seasonal exposures to ozone and particles." Archives of Environmental Health, Vol. 55, No. 3, pp. 210-216, May/June 2000.

3 Galizia, A. and Kinney, P.L. "Long-term residence in areas of high ozone…" Environmental Health Perspectives, Vol. 107, No. 8, pp. 675-679, August 1999.

4 Lancet Medical Journal, February 2002.

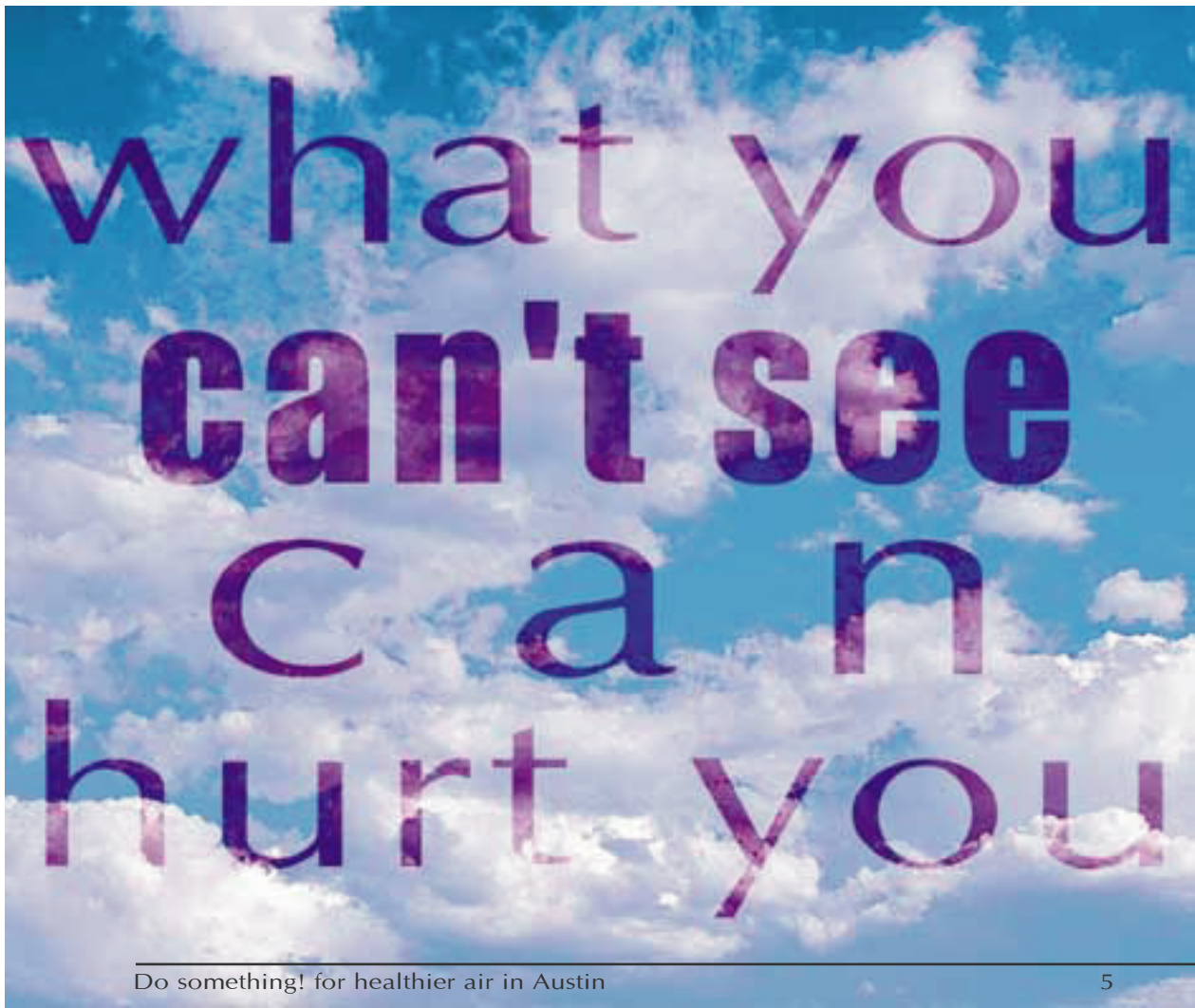
Aren't there other pollutants to worry about?

The EPA defines six "criteria" air pollutants that can be a threat to public health: ozone (O_3), carbon monoxide (CO), nitrogen dioxide (NO_2), lead (Pb) and two sizes of particulate matter (PM 10, PM 2.5). In some areas across the nation, other pollutants are quite serious. In particular, PM 2.5 is gaining attention in parts of Texas. However, Austin is primarily concerned with ozone. That's the only pollutant for which local concentrations regularly approach federal standards.

What's the Air Quality Index (AQI)?

The EPA's Air Quality Index is a guide to the overall quality of a region's air based on levels of major air pollutants. The AQI represents the health risk from the most severe pollutant on any given day. In Austin, that's usually ozone.

An AQI forecast is issued as both a number and a color-coded scale, from green (healthy) to deep purple (hazardous). AQI numbers are very close to the parts-per-billion measurement for ozone, but not the same. The AQI number is calculated on a uniform scale for all pollutants. For instance, a measured ozone level of 85 ppb is equal to an AQI of 100 — both mark the level at which ozone concentrations begin to be unhealthy for sensitive groups. Learn more about how the AQI is determined at **www.epa.gov/airnow/aqibroch**.



in your car

Why do cars and trucks pollute the air?

Combustion engines burn fossil fuels. The most common fuels are gasoline and diesel, which emit pollutants when burned. The less fuel you burn, the fewer pollutants your car produces — so better gas mileage is better for our air.

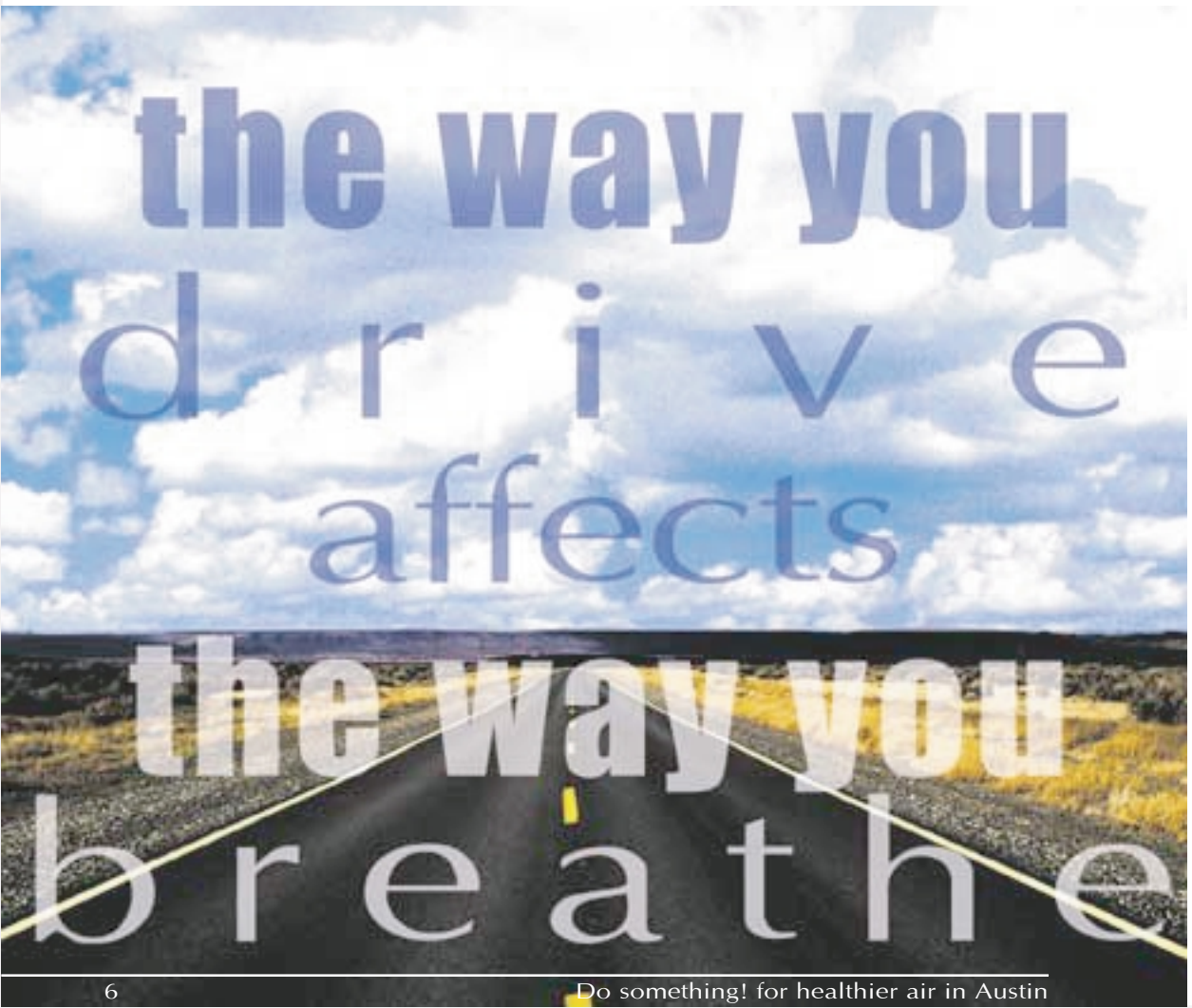
My car doesn't smoke — isn't it fine?

While a smoking vehicle is a definite tip-off to a polluting car, even cars without visible tailpipe emissions are contributing to ozone formation. If you do see a smoking vehicle, you can report it by calling 1-800-453-SMOG. Have the vehicle license number, date, time and location ready.

The best way to find out if your car or truck is a high-emitter is to have your vehicle emissions tested. Ask if your mechanic has the equipment to measure vehicle emissions at your next tune up. If not, the CLEAN AIR Force of Central Texas periodically hosts free emissions testing events: see www.cleanairforce.org.

Are emissions tests required in Austin?

Not yet. Although some areas of Texas (like Dallas and Houston) have Inspection and Maintenance (I/M) programs that require vehicle emissions tests, Austin currently does not. Because I/M can substantially improve air quality, it may be necessary to implement such a program in the future.



How can I "drive clean"?

The statewide Drive Clean Across Texas campaign encourages motorists to boost air quality with better car care and driving habits. Change your oil and filters regularly, and take your vehicle in for routine maintenance. Between tune-ups, keep your tires inflated to the recommended pressure to smooth your ride and increase gas mileage. (Better gas mileage is better for the air, since the less gasoline you burn, the fewer pollutants you emit.) Also, avoid quick starts. Accelerate smoothly and don't "floor it." Don't ignore your "check engine" light — it could signal a problem that increases your car's emissions. And since the most common repairs needed to reduce vehicle emissions are quick and inexpensive (like changing an air filter or tightening a spark plug wire), there's no reason to delay. Learn more online at www.drivecleanacrosstexas.org.

How can I drive less?

In addition to alternative forms of transportation (like taking the bus or biking), you can drive less by driving smart. Pay attention to traffic reports to avoid getting stuck in congestion. Plan errands in advance so you can combine them into one efficient trip — you'll save time and gas. Make shopping lists, and don't go back for the little things you forget at the store — save 'em for the next trip.

Why shouldn't I keep the engine running?

When you idle – when you keep the engine running while waiting to pick up a friend or in a drive-thru lane — you're needlessly polluting the air. Two minutes of idling pollutes as much as a mile of driving, but instead you've gotten nowhere. Even in the hottest summer, you can save gas and wear on your car by rolling down the windows and turning off the engine while you wait. Park in the shade, or bring a hand fan. Sure, you have to idle sometimes (like in traffic), but many times it's even faster — not to mention cooler — to park and go inside instead of using the drive-thru lane. And in the winter, don't warm up the car. Modern engines don't need it, and even older models warm up faster while being driven.

Are some vehicles better than others?

In general, the better gas mileage a car gets, the fewer pollutants it's emitting. However, emissions classifications offer a more specific way to learn how much a car pollutes; ultra-low and super-ultra-low emissions vehicles (ULEV and SULEV) are the two cleanest categories. Alternative Fuel Vehicles (AFVs) rank among the best in terms of air quality, so propane (LPG) and compressed or liquid natural gas (CNG, LNG) vehicles can be great choices for fleet owners who have access to those fuels. Many private drivers are turning to hybrid electric vehicles, with all-electric vehicles also becoming widely available. If you're interested in buying a cleaner vehicle, you can look up emissions ratings for specific vehicles online at www.epa.gov/greenvehicles.

What about diesel cars and trucks?

When we think of diesel engines, most of us picture eighteen-wheelers and heavy construction equipment. However, some private vehicles also operate on diesel fuel — most of these are pickup trucks or European cars. Although they burn a different fuel, diesel engines also produce significant amounts of NOx, a precursor to ozone. Additionally, small particulate matter from diesel emissions is a growing health concern. Improved fuel technologies may alleviate these issues in the future; however, "driving clean" in any type of vehicle can go a long way toward improving air quality today.

at home

How does energy relate to ozone?

Most of our energy comes from burning fossil fuels, which releases chemicals that combine to form ozone. When you use less energy, power plants burn fewer fossil fuels to meet demand. Wise energy use can dramatically reduce the load on power plants, preventing the need for new plants or "backup" generation and helping to ensure that we all have power when we need it.

How can I use less energy?

Switch to compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs), especially in porch lights and other fixtures that stay on longer. You can also save energy with proper insulation and ductwork to prevent leaks. Save even more by keeping thermostats at or above 78° in the summer and below 68° in winter. Replace appliances with Energy Star equipment when it's time to upgrade, and always turn off what you're not using.

Why is it important to save water?

It takes energy to pump water to your home and to treat that water before and after you use it. The more water you use, the more energy is needed to bring that water to you, so cutting back on water can help spare the air. Low-flow shower heads, toilets and washing machines can all reduce your water usage.

How does helping the air save me money?

Since you're usually charged based on the amount of energy or water you use, using less will reduce your utility bills. Most energy- and water-saving actions are quickly repaid in utility savings, so the money you spend to upgrade to efficient appliances or fixtures is well worth it. Many utilities offer rebates for efficient appliances — see www.austinenergy.com for energy information, and check out the water conservation programs at www.cityofaustin.org/watercon. Need more reasons? Energy-saving CFLs last up to ten times longer than traditional bulbs, so you save in replacement costs, too.

What about recycling?

By reducing processing and materials waste, recycling saves energy and money. The City of Austin collects household recyclables at curbside, including bottles, cans, paper and corrugated cardboard. See www.austinrecycles.com for accepted materials and information. You can also visit an Ecology Action drop-off site to recycle additional items like pasteboard cereal and soft drink boxes. Find locations at www.ecology-action.org.

outside

Do lawnmowers really pollute the air?

Mowing with a gas-powered mower for just one hour can pollute as much as driving your car 100 miles. Because lawnmower engines aren't subject to on-road regulations for efficiency, they're often surprisingly bad polluters. Electric lawnmowers are a better alternative, and new cordless models make it easier than ever to upgrade.

What about other lawn equipment?

Leaf blowers also come in electric models that are just as powerful as gas versions and often weigh less. Additionally, you can choose electric models when buying weed-eaters, edgers and trimmers. Or you could try it the old-fashioned way and get some exercise with a rake and hand tools to keep your lawn looking sharp.

How can I paint safely?

Whenever possible, choose low-VOC paints (generally latex or water-based) and use brushes and rollers instead of sprays. You'll help the air and reduce noxious fumes.

What about grilling?

Grilling is a rite of summer (and fall and winter for many of us), and one of the best ways to enjoy a beautiful day. However, lighter fluid contains VOCs that can contribute to ozone. If you grill with charcoal, try an electric or chimney-style starter to get your charcoals glowing. If you have a gas grill, clean it regularly.

How can I use less water on my yard?

Ever notice how just the tiniest rainfall seems to perk up your lawn? It's because your lawn doesn't need that much water — just enough to replace what's lost through evapo-transpiration (ET). Watering no more than once every five days ensures that your yard gets enough water and helps prevent mandatory water restrictions in the heat of summer. Xeriscaping is another great way to conserve water, since native plants need less water to thrive. Be water-wise: Check your watering day and ET amount at www.cityofaustin.org/watercon, and learn more about rainwater harvesting and xeriscaping rebates.

Can I still have fun?

There are many ways to enjoy yourself outdoors and prevent ozone. Try to avoid gas-powered recreational equipment like jet-skis and power boats, especially on high-ozone days. Swim, paddle or pedal your way to fun instead. Think locally: Find activities close to home instead of focusing your recreation on driving. You and your family can enjoy more time out of doors … and out of the car.

on the commute

If I don't drive, how am I supposed to get to work?

There are a number of different options for your commute, so it's easy to find the one that's right for you. Take a bus. Join a vanpool. Ride your bike. Start a carpool. Telework. Or walk. Trying alternative transportation just a few days per week can help ease traffic congestion, prevent air pollution and save you money.

But what if I don't live near a bus stop?

Look for a park-and-ride facility. They offer free parking for commuters and help you take advantage of bus service even if you're not within walking distance of a bus stop. Bike or drive a short distance (or have someone drop you off) and ride the bus the rest of the way.

What if I really need my car?

Capital Metro offers a Guaranteed Ride Home program for Express/Park & Ride, Flyer and Vanpool participants. For a small annual fee, riders can get up to four taxi rides home in case of emergencies like illness or unexpected overtime. And remember, even if you need your car one or two days a week you can still find another way to work the rest of the time.

Isn't it faster to drive?

Sometimes yes, sometimes no. How many times have you been passed by a cyclist while stuck in downtown traffic? Or wished that you could spend your commute reading a book or finishing up a project instead of behind the wheel? For many, a more relaxing commute is worth a few extra minutes.

How do I find people to carpool with?

Many large employers keep a database of employees who are interested in sharing rides to work. If you have an employee transportation coordinator or Commute Solutions liaison, contact them first. Also, you don't necessarily have to work in the same office as the people in your carpool — Capital Metro can help you find carpool buddies who live and work near you. Call 512-477-RIDE for details.

What's a vanpool?

A vanpool is a more formal carpool arrangement, usually through a transit provider. The vanpool provider supplies a vehicle and is responsible for maintenance, insurance and gas; riders pay a fee to participate. (In many cases, the driver rides for free.) Vanpools offer a more structured agreement that removes the need for a private vehicle and can accommodate a larger number of people than a traditional carpool. Many employers also offer preferred parking for vanpools or subsidize vanpool fees. See www.capmetro.org for more information.

How can I bike to work?

Biking to work can be a great way to get more exercise while reducing air pollution and traffic congestion. You can find preferred routes and Austin bike maps, as well as road safety tips, online at www.cityofaustin.org/bicycle.

How do flexible hours make a difference?

Flexible hours let you shift your commute out of peak driving times so you avoid most traffic and get to and from work faster. You spend less time in the car and help reduce traffic congestion. And less traffic congestion means less polluted air.

photo courtesy of Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority

How do I know which bus to take?

It's easy to figure out how to get where you're going on Capital Metro's website at www.capmetro.org. Call the Go Line at 512-474-1200 for help planning your route. If you take many different routes to travel all over town, you can ask for a copy of the latest printed schedule that maps bus routes and times.

What do you mean, "combine errands"?

Combining errands doesn't mean picking up your laundry at the video store or shopping only at strip malls. It simply means planning ahead so that when you must drive, you can do it efficiently. Think about where you need to go and plan the simplest route to incorporate all your stops. Use common sense: Shop at places in the same neighborhood and save time as well as gas. Listen to traffic reports to avoid congestion. Make shopping lists and don't go back for the little things you forget at the store — save 'em for the next trip.

Is it really that expensive to drive?

When you consider all the costs of car ownership, driving can be quite expensive. In addition to gas and maintenance, car owners must consider depreciation and insurance when calculating the cost of their commute. For instance, commuting 20 miles round trip in a mid-size car costs nearly $250 per month. Find the cost of your commute at www.commutesolutions.com and see if a bus or vanpool might be more economical. Even if you can't part with your car, you can often eliminate the need for a second (or third!) vehicle by considering your commute options.

at the office

I'm at a desk all day — what can I do to improve air quality?

Many of the same healthy-air actions you take at home can be applied to the office as well. The way you get to the office has a huge impact on our air, so try an alternative form of transportation on your daily commute. You can also pitch in by conserving energy and water, just as you would in your home. Start a recycling program at your office. Drive less during the middle of the day and if you can, work flexible hours to avoid driving in rush hour traffic.

How can I save energy at work?

You can save energy by using resources wisely and taking advantage of features that already exist in most modern office equipment. Set up the "sleep" function on your computer and turn off the monitor when you're away from your desk. Use less paper — don't print every email you receive and make double-sided copies. If you're the last to leave, hit the lights before you hit the door.

Own your own business? Find money-saving tips, rebates, and an online energy analysis at www.austinenergy.com. Businesses and homeowners alike can sign up for GreenChoice renewable energy, which is good for our air and your image.

What about my lunch break?

Just about everyone needs a break in the middle of the day, and it's nice to get out of the office. Try walking to lunch or bringing your lunch from home to eat in a nearby park. Nothing in walking distance? Organize a group of co-workers to order in or drive to lunch together — it's a chance to socialize and reduce the number of cars on the road.

I have so many meetings — what can I do?

If you have to drive to meetings, round up everyone in your office who's going and drive together — often you can shift schedules just a bit to make carpooling possible. It also helps to "right-size" the car you drive — don't take the largest vehicle for only one or two people. Planning a meeting? Choose the location so that attendees drive the shortest distance possible, or try teleconferencing. And when you can, conduct business with a phone call or an email instead of scheduling off-site meetings. You'll save time and gas.

What is teleworking?

Telework allows you to accomplish your job duties without being in the office. Usually that means working from home or while traveling. Many people telework without realizing it when they take work home in the evenings or call to check voice mail during off-hours. Telework helps our air quality when employees work from home instead of driving to the office. Skipping the drive into the office just once a week cuts your commute by 20% — and less driving means less pollution.

Often, employees find that they're less distracted when teleworking and can actually accomplish more than they do in a typical day at the office. It's not for everyone — teleworkers should have measurable tasks and a good relationship with their supervisor. If your job duties fit and your employer allows it, try teleworking once a week or a few times a month and save a trip to work.

Who's right for telework?

Telework is a great option for the right employee. Generally, computer-oriented jobs work well; data-entry, writing and editing are common tasks that teleworkers can accomplish easily from a remote office. Additionally, teleworkers need to be able to work with little supervision. Supervisors must trust employees to get their tasks completed when teleworking, so a good relationship is essential. Employees who telework should also have (or be able to obtain) any equipment they need to perform job duties. Often that includes a computer, but a telephone or a pen is sometimes all that's required. It should be noted that telework is not a substitute for child care, and it's not a chance to run errands or catch up on housework. Teleworkers are expected to devote the same attention to the job as in a traditional office.

As an employer, what can I do?

Employers can help improve our air quality by making it easier for employees to do their part. Offer subsidized bus passes or incentives (like premium parking spaces) for employees who carpool. Provide bike racks or a spare storage room so employees have a safe place to stow bicycles after riding to work. Some companies offer parking "cash-outs" to employees who trade a parking space for an alternate transportation method. Ultimately, your business could save money by leasing fewer parking spaces.

Start a telework program to cut vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and help reduce air pollution. Flexible schedules and compressed work weeks can also reduce VMT or shift traffic from congested hours. Even better, many of the same actions that help prevent pollution are also seen as "perks" — so you get happier employees in the bargain. How to get started? Join the Clean Air Partners. Visit www.cleanairpartnerstx.org to learn how your business can make a difference in our air quality.

ozone action days

What's an Ozone Action Day?

An Ozone Action Day (OZAD) is declared when ozone levels are likely to approach federal standards for air quality. On OZADs, it's crucial that we take action to help prevent ozone from rising to unhealthy levels. OZADs are announced on the afternoon of the previous day so that you can plan to avoid polluting activities.

Who decides if it's an OZAD?

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (formerly TNRCC, now TCEQ) forecasts an OZAD when weather conditions and pollutants are likely to result in unhealthy levels of ozone. Generally, high temperatures, clear skies and low winds equal prime ozone-forming conditions.

How do I find out?

The TCEQ operates an email notification list that sends an alert (usually by 3 p.m.) when an OZAD is forecast for the following day. To sign up, visit the TCEQ website at www.tceq.state.tx.us/air/monops/o3emailnotify.html. If you'd prefer to be notified in a different manner, many employers or local environmental groups offer notification services that can phone, fax, email or page subscribers. Check with your employer or contact the CLEAN AIR Force at 512-343-SMOG. Sign up online at www.cleanairforce.org.

Are OZADs ever on weekends?

You bet. And because most of us don't commute to work on Saturdays and Sundays it's easy to forget about OZADs. However, there are easy ways to do your part on the weekends — see the inset below..

Weekdays:

Take the bus — it's free on Ozone Action Days!

Bike, walk, or share a ride to work.

Telework: Ask your supervisor if you can work from home.

Refuel after 6 p.m. and don't top off the tank.

Don't drive at lunchtime — delay errands or walk.

Conserve water and energy (less energy = less air pollution).

You can do something on

OZZAD

ozone action days

Weekends:

Don't use a gas mower, or wait until 6 p.m.

At the lake, skip the motor and sail, swim or paddle.

Think locally — stay and play in your own neighborhood.

Ride the bus, bike or walk to run errands

Limit driving: combine errands and avoid traffic.

Avoid lighter fluid on your charcoal grill (try an electric or chimney-style starter instead).

Shouldn't we worry about ozone on other days, too?

Ozone can form at any time of the year, and there are certainly times when we have higher-than-average ozone levels but no Ozone Action Day. OZADs are called when ozone is most likely to exceed federal standards. However, if we can keep ozone low all the time, it's less likely to build up in the atmosphere.

Is it safe to be outside on an OZAD?

Sensitive groups (those with respiratory ailments, the elderly and young children) are advised to limit strenuous outdoor activity on Ozone Action Days. Even healthy adults can be affected, particularly when exercising. Many people report feeling short of breath more quickly when ozone levels are high, and there is a general increase in asthma attacks following high ozone levels. If you find that high ozone affects you, pay attention to OZAD reports and limit your outdoor activities.

What happens if we do have high ozone levels?

Our region's attainment status for ozone is determined by the fourth-highest annual ozone reading averaged over three years. If we exceed the ozone standard, we may lose federal highway funding and will be required to create a plan for attainment that includes enforceable control measures. Measures in existing nonattainment areas affect government, businesses and citizens alike. Often these include restrictions on the construction and landscaping industries and mandatory vehicle emissions tests.

What can my office do about OZADs?

The easiest way for your company or organization to respond to OZADs is to start an employee notification program. You can do that by signing up for TCEQ notification and sending an email or voice mail to all employees, or by posting flyers around the office to alert employees to an Ozone Action Day. Some employers can also change policy to help prevent ozone formation — schedule meetings after 10 a.m. to allow for flexible (non-rush hour) arrivals, teleconference or email instead of driving to meetings, and allow employees to telework on OZADs. Department groups can order-in lunch or carpool. Delay gas-powered landscaping work and refuel fleet vehicles later in the afternoon. Offer alternative transportation incentives and encourage employees to ride the bus for free on OZADs!

Can I really make a difference?

Absolutely. We measure ozone in parts per billion (ppb), and as little as one ppb of ozone can make the difference between just another hot day and an EPA air quality violation. With such a small margin for error, little things really do add up on Ozone Action Days, and actions you take to help prevent ozone formation really do matter.

everyday

Even a little

It's a little like voting: Individual choices add up to decide our future. Even the smallest actions can make a difference…whether it's choosing to walk to lunch, take the bus to work or skip mowing your lawn. And the more healthy-air choices you make, the sooner we can all breathe easy.

can help a lot.

There's a lot to be done to ensure healthy air for Austin's future. New technologies will certainly help, but to achieve our clean air goals we'll need citizens like you to pitch in. How can you help? Be willing to break your routine and try something better for the air.

Learn how you can

There's lots of great information about air quality that just can't fit in these pages. We've listed some of our favorite websites so you can learn more. Explore these sites (and their links!) to stay informed about healthy-air alternatives in Austin.

do something.

What's the easiest thing you can do for our air quality? Talk. Spread the word to friends and family about what you do to help prevent ground-level ozone. Help a coworker find a bus route. Pass along a phone number or website address. Be a role model for air quality. It's the best thing you can do for healthier air in Austin.

City of Austin Services		
Air Quality	www.cityofaustin.org/airquality	(512) 974-2635
Austin Energy	www.austinenergy.com	(512) 494-9400
Bicycle & Pedestrian	www.cityofaustin.org/bicycle	(512) 974-5606
Green Building Program	www.cityofaustin.org/greenbuilder	(512) 974-3700
GreenChoice Energy	www.austinenergy.com	(512) 494-9400
Grow Green (Water Quality)	www.growgreen.org	(512) 974-2550
Solid Waste Services	www.austinrecycles.com	(512) 494-9400
Water Conservation	www.cityofaustin.org/watercon	(512) 974-2199
Regional Organizations		
Capital Metro	www.capmetro.org	(512) 474-1200
CAMPO	www.cityofaustin.org/campo	(512) 974-2275
CAPCO	www.capco.state.tx.us	(512) 916-6000
CARTS	www.ridecarts.com	(800) 456-RIDE
CLEAN AIR Force	www.cleanairforce.org	(512) 343-SMOG
Clean Air Partners	www.cleanairpartnerstx.org	(512) 300-0011
Commute Solutions	www.commutesolutions.com	(512) 974-6051
Ecology Action	www.ecology-action.org	(512) 322-0000
Statewide Initiatives		
Drive Clean Across Texas	www.drivecleanacrosstexas.org	
TCEQ (formerly TNRCC)	www.tceq.state.tx.us/ozone.html	(512) 239-1000
National & Federal Programs		
Air Now (EPA)	www.epa.gov/airnow	
American Lung Association	www.lungusa.org	(800) LUNG-USA
Clean Cities (DOE)	www.ccities.doe.gov	(800) 224-8437
Energy Star (EPA/DOE)	www.energystar.gov	(888) STAR-YES