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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 1, 2010

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2010 Ozone Season Begins in Dane County

Pending Stronger Federal Standards Means that Dane County Residents and Businesses Need to Step Up Now More than Ever to Prevent Air Pollution and Protect Public Health

Hot summery weather has made a return to Dane County and so has ozone season. The Dane County Clean Air Coalition (DCCAC) will call a *Clean Air Action Day* for ozone when air pollution is forecast to reach unhealthy levels for ground-level ozone.

A *Clean Air Action Day* for ozone is triggered when the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) meteorologists notify the DCCAC that an ozone-related air quality watch has been called because weather conditions may produce unhealthy levels of ozone on the following day. In the summer of 2009, no *Clean Air Action Days* were called for ozone. This was most likely due to a combination of generally cooler weather and various emission reduction activities on the part of Dane County residents and businesses. Since we can't control the weather patterns, the only way we can ensure healthy air is through emission reduction actions.

"*Clean Air Action Days* are a voluntary way for government agencies, businesses and citizens in Dane County to do their share for cleaner air," said Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk. "Now, more than ever, as Dane County continues to grow in the face of even more stringent federal ozone standards, preventive actions must be taken to ensure that our air remains healthy into the future."

The levels of ozone reached over this 2010 ozone season could prove critical for Dane County since the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently proposed the strictest limits yet for the air pollutant. The EPA proposed the new standard – which will fall somewhere between 60 to 70 ppb for ozone – based on the recommendations of a panel of scientific advisers, which told the EPA that a growing body of research shows that smog levels must be reduced further to protect public health, especially in sensitive populations such as children, the elderly and people with heart and lung problems.

"We've been making progress in improving the quality of the air we breathe in Dane County, but as the EPA prepares to finalize new, more stringent federal ozone standards all of us will need to step up our efforts and take action to promote cleaner air and protect public health," said Lisa MacKinnon, DCCAC Project Coordinator. "The Clean Air Coalition offers area businesses, institutions, local governments and residents information, assistance and tools to help them do that."

What a Stricter Ozone Standard Could Mean for Dane County

The current standard is 75 ppb and Dane County comes in below that current threshold for the 2007-2009 three year rolling average. However, depending on how low EPA sets the new threshold

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and the type of ozone year Dane County has in 2010, the County could exceed the federal public health standards for ozone. The new final standard is scheduled to be announced by EPA this August. EPA will most likely determine whether Dane County complies with the new standard based on the County's 2008-2010 ozone measurements.

Air pollution hurts public health and our economy. If federal air pollution standards are exceeded here in Dane County, businesses and institutions could face mandatory regulations to reduce air pollution, which could cost our citizens and businesses millions of dollars each year. The Dane County Clean Air Coalition (www.healthyairedane.org) offers County residents information and tools to help them take daily action for healthier air. For instance, DCCAC's *Healthy Air Employer Network* offers Dane County employers an opportunity to promote clean air actions at work that reduce their emissions of ozone and other air pollutants on *Clean Air Action Days*, as well as throughout the year.

Why *Clean Air Action Days* for Ozone?

A *Clean Air Action Day* for ozone lets people know that ground-level ozone could reach an unhealthy level especially for children, older adults, people with asthma and adults engaged in vigorous outdoor activities. *Clean Air Action Days* also remind people of simple actions they can take to improve the air we all breathe.

What is Ozone?

Ozone in the upper atmosphere is a good thing, protecting the earth from the sun's harmful ultraviolet rays. But ozone found close to the earth's surface, or ground-level ozone, is a key component of smog and a harmful pollutant (i.e., ozone is "good up high, but bad nearby.").

Clean Air Action Days occur on hot days with lots of sun and little or no wind when pollutants (volatile organic compounds (VOCs) and nitrogen oxides (NOx)) "cook" in the hot sunlight to form ground-level ozone. The major sources of VOCs and NOx include:

- Cars, trucks and buses
- Gasoline storage, transfer and refueling
- Large utility and industrial facilities
- Industrial use of solvents and degreasing agents
- Off-road engines such as construction equipment, aircraft, locomotives, boats and lawn & garden equipment

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What You Can Do to Reduce Ozone

During a *Clean Air Action Day*, government agencies, businesses and citizens will be asked to do their share for cleaner air and the health of local residents by engaging in ozone-reducing activities. Because half of all Dane County's ozone-forming pollutants come from everyday activities like driving a car, refueling vehicles, or mowing the lawn, area residents can play an important role in reducing emissions. Actions that citizens can take on a *Clean Air Action Day* – and on any summer day – to reduce the likelihood of unhealthy levels of ozone formation include:

- Ride the Metro Transit bus to work or other destinations:
See <http://www.cityofmadison.com/metro/> or call 266-4466 for trip planning assistance.
- Join a car/vanpool: See <http://www.ci.madison.wi.us/rideshare/>
- Don't let your vehicle idle. It gets 0 MPG!
- Combine errands and reduce trips.
- Reschedule or delay lawn mowing using gas-powered equipment until after 6 p.m.
- Refuel your vehicle after dusk if possible.
- Conserve energy at home and work by reducing air conditioning and turning off unnecessary lighting.

In addition to taking various actions year-round to reduce polluted air emissions, DCCAC member organizations will activate their *Clean Air Action Day* response plans to help protect air quality and help ensure that Dane County continues to comply with all federal air quality standards. *Clean Air Action Day* response plans include alerting all employees via e-mail, urging employees to reduce single occupancy vehicle driving, limiting vehicle idling and avoiding refueling fleet vehicles until after 6 p.m., reducing or postponing mowing and painting whenever possible and conserving energy by reducing air conditioning and lighting.

For more information on *Clean Air Action Days*, visit the Dane County Clean Air Coalition website at www.healthyairdane.org. Air Quality Watches and Advisories will be posted on the main DNR internet page, <http://dnr.wi.gov/>, as soon as they are issued. The Air Quality Hotline is 1-866-DAILY AIR (1-866-324-5924) and will be updated when watches or advisories are issued. To sign up for the DNR listserv and receive watches or advisories by e-mail, go to <http://dnr.wi.gov/air/newsletters/>.

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