

Counties receive ozone grades

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GREEN RIVER -- Three Wyoming counties impacted by energy development received average grades for dangerous ozone pollution this week in a new national report.

Cheyenne, on the other hand, was proclaimed the cleanest city in the country for long-term particle pollution levels.

The American Lung Association's 10th Annual State of the Air report was released Wednesday, said spokeswoman Heather Grzelka.

The report included the group's national "air quality report card," which assigns grades for ozone and other pollutants across the country.

Campbell County in northwest Wyoming and Sublette County in western Wyoming each received a C grade for high ozone days. The report said Teton County received a B grade.

Association officials said there was not enough air monitoring data for ozone to grade the rest of Wyoming's counties.

The Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside area of southern California was ranked the most polluted by ozone.

Sublette County and the Upper Green River Valley have registered at least slightly elevated ozone levels in several of the past winters. During the winter of 2007-08, the pollutant exceeded the federal ozone standard of 75 parts per billion on 14 days.

The ozone warnings prompted state officials in March to submit a recommendation to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency seeking to designate the county and some surrounding areas as a federal ozone nonattainment area.

Ozone is the most widespread form of air pollution and smog. When inhaled, ground-level ozone can irritate lungs, impair breathing and pose health threats to children, the elderly and people with respiratory problems.

Wyoming's three grades were calculated by analyzing ozone and short-term levels of particle pollution, including nitrogen oxide and volatile organic compound emissions.

Scientists believe NOX and VOC emissions, when combined with the right meteorological conditions of snow cover, warm weather and temperature inversions, can cause dangerous ozone pollution at ground level during the winter months.

Grzelka said the association used state and federal air quality monitors in the three counties to gather data -- on the days when air pollution levels reached their higher ranges -- to calculate the grades.

The association's report also ranked cities and counties most affected by ozone, smog and other pollutants. The study said six out of 10 Americans -- or about 186 million people -- live in areas where air pollution levels "endanger lives."

Cheyenne ranked No. 1 on the list of the 10 cleanest cities for long-term particle pollution.

Salt Lake City ranked sixth for cities most polluted by short-term particle pollution.

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