



New ozone task force not enough, some in Pinedale say

By KELSEY DAYTON Casper Star-Tribune and wire reports | Posted: Thursday, January 19, 2012

PINEDALE, Wyo. — A new citizen's advisory group and voluntary reduction of emissions by energy companies to combat high ozone levels in the Upper Green River Basin isn't sufficient for some Pinedale residents.

Pinedale resident Elaine Crumpley said hearing what energy companies plan to do is encouraging but not enough until they actually take action.

"I think it's all hypothetical at this point," she said.

Residents have sat through countless meetings about ozone pollution and have seen few results, said Pinedale resident Mary Lynn Worl.

"It's one thing to make a commitment on paper," she said.

Both women are members of Citizens United for Responsible Energy Development, a citizens group formed to address energy industry pollution and effects on human health in the basin. They were among the estimated 50 people in attendance, including Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality staffers, at a public meeting Tuesday night hosted by the DEQ.

Ozone has been a perennial problem in the basin for several winters. Temperature inversions, which is cold air trapped by warmer air from above, combined with sunshine reflected off ground snow can trigger atmospheric chain reactions that turn gas-development pollution into ozone.

Last winter, ozone levels in the area soared above levels normally seen in big cities during the summer. Levels in the basin even surpassed any seen in smoggy Los Angeles in all of 2010, and state officials urged schools to keep children indoors during recess. The elderly and people with respiratory conditions also were told to stay inside.

Some people complained of itchy eyes and

nosebleeds.

The DEQ has set up a daily forecast that will inform people when conditions will be ripe for high ozone and whether companies will need to scale back operations. The department has been working with Pinedale radio station KPIN to announce daily forecasts for ozone.

There have been no warnings for high ozone yet this winter.

The agency held Tuesday's meeting to update citizens on efforts under way and in the works to reduce elevated ozone levels in the basin.

Mike Shaffron from Encana Corp. offered an update on industry efforts to quickly reduce emissions. He said such companies as BP, Chevron, Exxon, Shell and Encana proposed ideas beyond basic ozone contingency plans.

"The question is, will it help?" he said.

There needs to be more accountability, said Crumpley. She suggested companies should be required to update equipment to make better use of the best available technology to reduce emissions.

This year, a lack of snow, a key component to winter ozone, has offered a reprieve from smog, Crumpley said. That hasn't been the result of industry action, she said.

Worl said energy development happened too fast for the small town, and the issues about ozone go beyond just health.

She said the air pollution causes stress and concern about the landscape, wildlife and the future of the town.

Crumpley said so much of Wyoming is governed on a seasonal basis, such as during the hunting season, that energy work could also be seasonal in order to avoid winter ozone.

Stephanie Kessler with the Wilderness Society began following the winter ozone issue in Sublette County several years ago. She said the DEQ has put forth a "good faith, aggressive effort" to mitigate air pollution.

But its efforts haven't worked, she said. She wanted to know why all companies aren't required to improve old facilities.

"All strategies have to be on the table," she said.