

## Pollution limits not reached

By The Associated Press

CHEYENNE - Preliminary data shows that air pollution did not exceed federal standards for any eight-hour time period this past winter in southwest Wyoming, according to the state Department of Environmental Quality.

While the news is welcome, it's unclear why ozone wasn't much of a problem this winter as it was in the previous winter, when the pollutant exceeded federal standards over the course of 14 days.

"There are so many variables involved here," DEQ spokesman Keith Guille said Thursday.

The state agency will continue to work with the oil and gas industry and local citizens in the area on reducing emissions that are blamed in part on the ozone problems, Guille said.

Pinedale resident Linda Baker of the Upper Green River Valley Coalition said she noticed that the air was clearer this winter.

"But I also knew at the same time that there were fewer rigs out there; it wasn't hard to draw conclusions," Baker said.

However, Randy Teeuwen, spokesman for EnCana Inc., one of largest operators in southwest Wyoming, said there's no scientific proof that a slowdown in drilling was a major contributor to the improved air.

"What I would say is that we have worked diligently to reduce our emissions in Jonah field and will continue to do so," he said. He said that the company will continue to reduce emission levels regardless of how many rigs it has in the Jonah Field.

Thousands of oil and gas wells have been drilled in Sublette County in recent years, and some area residents long have advocated slowing down the drilling as the best solution to improving the air quality.

Ground-level ozone, a key component of smog, forms when the sun bakes pollutants such as vehicle exhaust and gas vapors. It can pose a health risk for children and people with respiratory problems.

Scientists believe the ozone in Wyoming is caused by a combination of pollution emitted from natural-gas fields and certain meteorological conditions that include calm weather, snow cover, sunny skies and strong temperature inversions.

Because of the pollution that occurred in 2008, Gov. Dave Freudenthal last month notified the federal government that air quality in southwest Wyoming failed to meet federal ozone requirements.

The action would likely require the state to develop a formal plan for reducing ozone there.

EnCana and other large companies operating in southwest Wyoming have taken steps to reduce pollution from field equipment.

They also have initiated a new plan to curtail operations when the DEQ expected conditions to be ripe for creation of ozone.

The agency issued advisories for possible ozone on two days in February, and the companies did cut back on certain activities on those two days.

However, low natural gas prices also have slowed drilling this winter.