

Smog in Caledon – Protect Your Family

Did you know that on many days, the air quality in Caledon is the same as downtown Toronto – or even worse? Yes, smog is that brownish haze we see hanging over the city on summer days, but it can also be invisible. Smog is a combination of airborne pollutants and particles that come from vehicles, coal-burning electricity generators, gas or diesel-powered machinery, airborne dust and other sources. Some kinds of smog travel long distances - about half of Caledon's smog comes from the U.S. In Ontario, our giant coal burning electricity generators are a major source. Caledon recently had three smog advisories on days when poor air quality extended from Windsor all the way up to Parry Sound.

The Ministry of the Environment issues a smog watch when there is a 50 per cent chance that poor air quality (Air Quality Index over 50) will occur within the next three days. A smog advisory is issued when poor air quality will occur within next 24 hours. The air quality forecast is at www.airqualityontario.com.

Protect yourself and your family:

In some people, even mild exposure to bad air can cause eye, nose and throat irritations, coughing, wheezing and shortness of breath. Smog can lower resistance to infection and cause people with heart and lung conditions to get even sicker. Seniors, children, pregnant women and even healthy athletes are at particular risk.

If you plan to exercise on a warm day, check the air quality forecast. According to The Canadian Journal of Public Health, people should reduce strenuous physical outdoor activities when the Air Quality Index is over 50, especially during the late afternoon when ground-level ozone reaches its peak. The harm of exercising in smog can outweigh the benefits of the exercise, since you breathe so much more air during intensive activity. Plan exercise for early morning, if possible.

Parents and coaches should be prepared to modify plans for after-school sports and track meets, since children are more susceptible to smog-related health issues. Outdoor workers may need to modify or postpone certain projects that involve intensive effort. If strenuous outdoor activities or exercise are unavoidable, drink plenty of fluids, take breaks, and monitor your health and the health of your children. Sensitive people may need to stay indoors in a room that is cool and moist. A HEPA air filter may help.

What can you do to help on smog days?

1) Delay or reduce electricity use: Run dishwashers, laundry and baths in the evening or the next day. Air-dry dishes and laundry. Plan meals with shorter cooking times on the stove to avoid heating your house and making your air conditioner work harder.

Turn off lights and computer displays whenever you don't need them. This helps to keep your house or office cool too. Shut down your computer overnight, remembering to turn off hubs, routers, printers and modems. Put your pool motor on a timer to only run 8-12 hours.

Set your air conditioning temperature a few degrees higher. Relax dress codes at work to allow summer clothes on smog days.

2) Limit use of small engine tools: Small gasoline engines in mowers, chain saws and leaf blowers emit high levels of pollutants that cause smog. An older lawnmower engine can cause the same amount of smog in an hour as a new car driven 500 km! On smog days postpone mowing the lawn to another day. Use electric or (even better) manual tools.

3) Reduce car use: Walk, cycle (gently!), take public transit or carpool if you can. Bring your lunch and try to postpone running errands by car. Hold a teleconference instead of travelling to meetings. Work from home if possible.

Further information is available at:

Public Information Centre, Ontario Ministry of the Environment 1-800-565-4923
www.ene.gov.on.ca

Smog forecasts at Air Quality Ontario www.airqualityontario.com

For more information about this or other topics in the Caledon Clean Air Clean Energy Program, please contact us at cca@caledoncountryside.org or (905) 584-6221, or visit www.caledoncountryside.org/stepup.htm.

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