



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

July 17, 2006

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Forecast Code Red Bad Air Days Mean Free Bus Rides on ALL Northern Virginia Routes

(Arlington, VA) Northern Virginia's luck avoiding forecast Code Red Bad Air days has finally run out.

Over the past two summers, the Washington Metropolitan region got off easy with only a handful of unforecasted Code Red Air Quality Action Days. Unlike the summer of 2002, when the region bore the brunt of 12 forecast "Bad Air" days, the summers of 2003 through 2005 proved to be better for Washington Area residents, and all of us could breathe a little easier. With the temperature this week soaring to record highs and no relief in sight, what's in store for the rest of the summer of 2006?

In an ongoing region-wide effort to encourage citizens to drive less during the summer and help the region stay within federal clean air standards, **bus service providers in Northern Virginia will suspend fare collection on forecast Code Red Air Quality Action Days.** Funding for this free fare project is provided through a federal transportation grant obtained by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (VDRPT) for the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC).

When the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC) issues a “Bad Air” alert for the following day, area bus systems will not charge riders for taking the bus.

A forecast Code Red Air Quality Action Day or “Bad Air” Day means that ozone levels are predicted to be extremely high and the air quality very poor. By getting more commuters to take the bus, instead of driving their cars, the region hopes to limit the levels of Nitrogen Oxides (NOx) and other toxic emissions and to meet the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) air quality standards.

According to the American Lung Association, ozone acts as a powerful respiratory irritant at the levels frequently found in most of the nation's urban areas during summer months. Ozone exposure may lead to:

- shortness of breath;
- chest pain when inhaling deeply; and
- wheezing and coughing.

Long-term, repeated exposure to high levels of ozone may lead to large reductions in lung function, inflammation of the lung lining and increased respiratory discomfort. The EPA estimates that 5 to 20 percent of the total U.S. population is especially susceptible to the harmful effects of ozone air pollution.

Starting with the 2004 summer season, pollutants such as particulate matter are being measured in addition to ozone. According to the EPA, **Particulate Matter (PM)** is the term for particles found in the air, including dust, dirt, soot, smoke, and liquid droplets. Particles can be suspended in the air for long periods of time. Some particles are large or dark enough to be seen by the naked eye as soot or smoke. Others are so small that individually they can only be detected with an electron microscope. Many manmade and natural sources emit PM directly or emit other pollutants that react in the atmosphere to form PM. These solid and liquid particles come in a wide range of sizes.

Particles less than 10 micrometers in diameter (PM10) pose a health concern because they can be inhaled into and accumulate in the respiratory system. Particles less than 2.5 micrometers in diameter (PM2.5) are referred to as "fine" particles and are believed to pose the greatest health risks. Because of their small size (less than one-seventh the average width of a human hair), fine particles can lodge deeply into the lungs. Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5) is unhealthy to breathe and has been associated with premature mortality and other serious health effects. While high ozone levels affect

healthy children, the elderly and those who suffer from respiratory ailments, particulate matter primarily affects individuals with heart ailments. Many scientific studies have linked breathing PM to a series of significant health problems, including:

- aggravated asthma;
- increases in respiratory symptoms like coughing and difficult or painful breathing;
- chronic bronchitis;
- decreased lung function; and
- premature death.

While the EPA previously used a one hour standard to measure ozone and pollutants, the agency will now hold states to the newly implemented eight hour standard. This requires that ozone levels not exceed the maximum level of 0.08 parts per million (ppm) during an eight hour period. In establishing the 8-hour standard, the EPA defines the new standard as a "concentration-based" form, specifically the 3-year average of the annual 4th-highest daily maximum 8-hour ozone concentrations.

The Commonwealth of Virginia and other “non-attainment” areas have been put on notice: If the region fails to meet the EPA’s 8 - hour standard, Virginia and the rest of the region could risk losing all federal transit funding.

For more air quality information, next day forecasts, tips on improving air quality, and links to other air quality sites, contact Clean Air Partners at <http://www.cleanairpartners.net/> or 1-877-515-4593. Specific route information can be obtained by calling these transportation providers:

Alexandria DASH	(703) 370-DASH (3274)
Arlington Transit (ART)	(703) 228-RIDE (7433)
Fairfax City CUE	(703) 385-7859
Fairfax Connector	(703) 339-7200
Loudoun County Transit	(703) 771-5665/Metro (703) 478-8433
Metrobus	(202) 637-7000
OmniRide/OmniLink	(703) 730-OMNI (6664)
City of Falls Church GEORGE	(202) 637-7000

Make the Northern Virginia Transportation Commission (NVTC) your first call for information, interviews, and quotes from local elected officials and experts about public transportation issues in Northern Virginia.

For the most up-to-date information call Kala Quintana, NVTC's Director of Public Outreach, at 703/ 524-3322 ext 104.

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