



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Barbara C. Wagner
Chair

M. Howard Beach

Janet P. Brooks

Bruce R. Fernandez

Karyl Lee Hall

John M. Mandycyk

Richard Sherman

Norman VanCor

Karl J. Wagener
Executive Director

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Karl Wagener
(860) 424-4000
karl.wagener@ct.gov

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LAST WEEK'S AIR QUALITY WAS THE STATE'S WORST IN YEARS.

CEQ: FOR BETTER AIR, WE NEED EFFICIENT AIR CONDITIONERS

HARTFORD – The air in Connecticut last week was the most polluted of the summer and, for many towns, the worst in more than two years. Part of the problem was a big demand for electricity caused by the large number of inefficient air conditioners in the state, according to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ).

The CEQ explained that as the temperature goes up and people start their air conditioners, seldom-used power plants are called upon by ISO New England – the company that oversees the regional electricity supply – to start generating electricity to meet the peak demand. Some of these so-called “peaking plants” are more expensive to operate and produce more pollution on an hourly basis when compared to regularly-operating power plants. As an example, the CEQ noted that the “South Meadow Jets” facility in Hartford, which is used only rarely, was called upon to produce electricity last Thursday (September 2) to help meet the heightened demand. According to recent CEQ research, the South Meadow facility – which is essentially eight aging turbine engines that burn jet fuel – puts out more particulate matter on an hourly basis than almost any other power plant in the state.

According to the CEQ, the added pollution from these peaking plants is not an inevitable consequence of hot weather.

“In our annual report to the governor on the condition of Connecticut’s environment, we track the market share of appliances that are “Energy Star” rated, which are appliances that use less electricity to do their job,” said Council Chair Barbara Wagner of Glastonbury.

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“We have been reporting for years that most of the refrigerators sold in Connecticut are *not* Energy Star rated, which means that most consumers are wasting electricity and money to cool their food.”

“This August,” Wagner continued, “We reviewed the numbers for air conditioner sales. Unfortunately, the majority of room air conditioners sold in 2008 and 2009 were not the efficient Energy Star models.

The Council reports that the market share for efficient central air conditioning is more difficult to pin down, but historically it has not been encouraging, due in part to the fact that the short summers of Connecticut do not result in substantial cost savings for the buyers of Energy Star central air systems. A recent federal tax credit for high efficiency residential heating and cooling systems appears to have just started to reverse that trend, but the two-year tax credit is scheduled to expire at the end of 2010.

Because of the importance of Energy Star air conditioner sales to the air quality in our cities, the Council agreed at its August 25 meeting to add Energy Star air conditioner market share data to its annual report on Connecticut’s environment.

“There is some good news to report,” Wagner added.

“First, the South Meadow Jets are being used less this summer than in some previous years, due in part to their high operating costs as well as improvements in generation and transmission elsewhere in the grid. However, we remain concerned that many such power plants are in cities where asthma rates are high. We hope to see additional improvements in conservation, cleaner-fuel power plants and renewable energy that could eliminate the need for the jets altogether.”

“Second, we are anticipating new federal and state regulations that might reduce the pollution from power plants that operate during periods of peak electricity demand.”

“And third, preliminary data suggest that the recent state rebates and federal tax credits for efficient central air conditioning systems have had a positive effect. Unfortunately, the funds for state rebates for Connecticut consumers are all used up, and the two-year federal tax credit will expire at the end of 2010 unless it is extended.”

The Council will be evaluating possible recommendations that could boost Energy Star appliance sales, such as restoration of the state’s effective rebate program and extension of the federal tax credit.

“Our choice is not between keeping cool and sweltering,” Wagner said. “Our choice is between cooling our homes in an efficient way or in an inefficient way. The best way to beat the high cost of electricity is to use less, and the easiest way to use less is to buy efficient appliances, especially air conditioners and refrigerators.”

Wagner concluded, “When you turn on an inefficient air conditioner on a steamy day, you turn on the air pollution. It’s a direct line. However, if we all use air conditioners that don’t waste so much electricity, we can stay comfortable, save money and breathe better air – and that’s pretty cool.

The CEQ is the state agency that is charged by statute to report annually to the governor on the status of Connecticut’s environment. It functions independently of the Department of Environmental Protection.

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