Communicating daily and hourly air quality information

In October 2015, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lowered the federal 8-hour ozone standard from 75 parts per billion (ppb) to 70 ppb and in turn, updated the Air Quality Index (AQI) scale to match the latest ozone standard.

The formulas used for calculating the AQI are tied to the national ambient air quality standards set by the EPA for each pollutant. Therefore, as standards change, the calculated AQI changes accordingly.

In January 2016, the District’s Governing Board took action to adopt the new AQI scale before the 2016 ozone season for reporting, forecasting, and analysis.

In addition to complying with the federal requirement to report the daily AQI to the public, the District has instituted a more advanced public education program using the District’s ground-breaking Real-time Air Advisory Network (RAAN) system which provides Valley schools, parents and the general public with real-time access to hour-by-hour local air quality conditions.

The District is also launching a focused public outreach effort to help avoid public confusion with the new AQI while encouraging the utilization of the District’s more health-protective RAAN system. Part of the District’s outreach efforts will be an assessment of the need for potential changes to the Real-time Outdoor Activity Risk (ROAR) guidelines for ozone.

The District will couple this education effort with the Healthy Air Living Schools initiative further educating individuals about RAAN and the AQI.

Finally, District staff will consult health experts and work with schools to gauge anticipated participation under varying RAAN action levels that may potentially be changed by the new AQI scale.