

Environmental Quality

Outdoor Air Quality in Illinois



Like the weather, air quality can change from day to day. Local air quality can affect daily lives and air pollution can cause serious health problems. The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency issues daily air quality forecasts, based on the Air Quality Index, AQI, for 14 sectors in Illinois and posts the information at [AIRNow.gov](https://airnow.gov). The AQI is a color-coded system that classifies air quality from “Good” (Green) to “Hazardous” (Maroon), based on the five most common air pollutants, including ozone and airborne particles.

Because air quality can change as a result of weather conditions, long-range air quality forecasts are not possible. Air quality forecasts, typically issued the afternoon prior, may be updated throughout the day if conditions warrant. Air quality forecasts are developed by Illinois EPA staff who monitor current weather, air quality conditions, and projected forecasts and models to determine what the expected air quality will be for the coming day.

Air Pollution Action Days

Action Days are usually called when the Air Quality Index is in an unhealthy range. However, there is no current national requirement or threshold to issue such public service messages, resulting in different states or agencies calling Action Days at varying levels and by different names.

In Illinois, the Air Pollution Action Day program has historically been specific to only the Chicago Metropolitan Area, Cook and the surrounding counties, but has been expanded to all 14 sectors in Illinois where air quality is forecast. Such action days are called when air quality is forecast to be at or above the Orange or “Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups” category of the AQI for two or more consecutive days.

Conditions that trigger an Air Pollution Action Day or National Weather Service Air Quality Alert:

- **Chicago Air Pollution Action Day:** Air quality is forecast to be at or above the Orange or “Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups” category of the AQI for two or more consecutive days for the Chicago Metropolitan Area, Cook County, and surrounding counties.
- **Statewide or Areawide Air Pollution Action Day:** Air quality is forecast to be at or above the Orange or “Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups” category on the AQI statewide or in nearly all Illinois sectors.
- **Red Air Pollution Action Day:** Air quality is forecast to be at or above the Red or “Unhealthy” category on the AQI for any sector in Illinois.

Protecting Your Health and Our Environment

While large wildfires are uncommon in Illinois, wildfire smoke can travel long distances to Illinois from other states and countries. Air quality alerts should be taken seriously by everyone in affected areas.

Stay informed; check the current and forecasted air quality conditions and find health information at Illinois EPA, [EPA.Illinois.gov/topics/Air-Quality/Outdoor-Air.html](https://epa.illinois.gov/topics/Air-Quality/Outdoor-Air.html), or [AIRNow.gov](https://airnow.gov). Sign up to receive Free Air Quality Forecast Alerts at [EnviroFlash.info](https://enviroflash.info).

Authorship

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