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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Air Quality Alert Issued for Friday and Saturday Drivers Will See Alert Posted on ODOT's Overhead Dynamic Message Signs

(COLUMBUS, August 13, 2009) –The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) is issuing an Air Quality Alert for Friday, August 14 and Saturday, August 15. The counties of Delaware, Fairfield, Franklin, Knox, Madison and Licking are likely to experience ozone and particle pollution levels that are unhealthy for sensitive groups. Tomorrow the Air Quality Index (AQI) is forecasted to be 111 and Saturday's AQI is forecasted to be 124. Friday marks the sixth Air Quality Alert of the year and Saturday marks the seventh.

In conjunction with the Air Quality Alerts, MORPC and the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) are launching a new initiative that will post the Alerts on the ODOT Transportation Management Center's overhead dynamic message signs on the afternoon before and the day of the Air Quality Alert. The goal is to provide commuters with up-to-date information when central Ohio's air pollution is expected to reach levels that are considered to be unhealthy for certain sensitive groups, including people with heart or respiratory disease, older adults and active children. The messages will also provide a tip to reduce emissions that form ozone and particle pollution, such as "fuel up after 6 p.m." or "combine trips."

"We are excited to utilize the dynamic message signs to provide commuters valuable information to help them protect their health and reduce pollution," said Thomas J. Wester, ODOT District 6 Deputy Director. "It's a win-win situation."

Critical traffic messages, Amber Alerts, Silver Alerts, and Severe Weather Alerts take precedence over Air Quality Alert Messages. Currently, the Cincinnati area is the only other Ohio region to provide commuters with Air Quality Alert information via dynamic message signs.

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Ground-level ozone pollution is a colorless, odorless gas produced when emissions from our cars, lawn equipment and industry react together in the presence of sunlight. Particle pollution is a mixture of solids and liquid droplets that vary in size. Sources include motor vehicle exhaust, diesel trucks, construction equipment, and power plants.

MORPC uses the national AQI scale to inform the public about daily ozone and particle pollution levels in central Ohio. The AQI runs from 0 to 300—the higher the AQI value, the greater the health concern. When levels reach above 100, air quality is considered to be unhealthy for sensitive groups, which includes people with respiratory and heart disease, children and older adults. MORPC issues an Air Quality Alert to the public when pollution levels reach 101 or higher.

People with asthma are more likely to suffer an increase in the number and severity of symptoms during an Air Quality Alert. To decrease the potential for health implications, sensitive groups are urged to limit prolonged outdoor exertion. People who are experiencing breathing difficulties should consult with their doctor. More information on the health effects of ozone pollution is available at: www.franklincountyohio.gov/health/airpollution.htm and www.publichealth.columbus.gov.

Visit <http://airquality.morpc.org> and click on the EnviroFlash logo to receive free Air Quality Alert notifications. You can be aware of the air you're breathing, and plan your days accordingly.

MORPC recommends taking the following actions to help reduce ozone pollution:

- Reduce driving and consider using COTA, carpooling, biking or walking to your destinations by contacting RideSolutions at (888) 742-RIDE. Cars and trucks are major contributors to air pollution in the region.
- Turn off your engine instead of idling your vehicle to cut down on vehicle emissions that contribute to ground-level ozone pollution. You will save gas by turning the engine off and restarting it again if you expect to idle for more than 30 seconds. You will also prevent pollution by avoiding long idles. Next time, park your car and go into the bank or restaurant.
- Refuel your vehicle after 6 p.m. Filling up your tank when the direct sunlight and heat have diminished helps reduce ozone pollution.
- Avoid topping off your tank at the gas station. Spilled gasoline pollutes the air when it evaporates.
- Consider mowing your lawn on a day when there is not an Air Quality Alert. Longer grass in your yard is good for the air, as well as the lawn.