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Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America, Texas Chapter, 9101 Quarter Horse Lane
Ft. Worth, TX 76123 817-297-3132 888-933-2232 info@aafatexas.org www.aafatexas.org

DANGER: OUTDOOR AIR POLLUTION

* Call it smog, call it ozone but call it polluted air and call it dangerous. **Polluted air is** air contaminated by toxic wastes, gases, (including ozone) and fine particulate matter and is a worldwide problem. Polluted air isn't pretty, it isn't healthy. Sometimes you can see polluted air as an orange-red color which is caused by the nitrogen dioxide in the air. **Fine particulate matter**, perhaps the most toxic aspect of dirty air, is a mixture of solids and liquid droplets from aerosols, smoke, fumes, dust, ash and pollens and is smaller than a human strand of hair; it seeps right into your lungs and then into your bloodstream. Dirty air makes it difficult to breathe, makes eyes water and burn, literally takes your breath and voice away; it makes your chest hurt, causes coughing and headaches. Dirty or polluted air, especially fine particulate matter in the air, **contributes not only to asthma symptoms** but to heart disease, cancer, diabetes and premature death.

Currently southern California attributes 9000 deaths a year to polluted air and recent studies show that number may be underestimated by 60%. Scary, isn't it? But what does it have to do with you? And what can you do about it?

* It's important to you because **polluted air**, especially **dangerous for anyone** with a respiratory illness (asthma, allergies, COPD, bronchitis, lung cancer) also has **harmful affects for all, even the healthiest individuals** like competitive athletes, people with no history of respiratory illness. Our athletes preparing for the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China are concerned about polluted air because Beijing is situated in a geographical bowl and toxic wastes and exhaust gases (ozone) are trapped. The result is some of the most polluted air on the planet. For the first time, Olympic athletes are opting to train outside the host country and many will not even arrive in Beijing until just 72 hours before their competitive events. U.S. cyclists are training by wearing face masks. Our team's medical directors are concerned about the effects this pollution will have on performance. They're right to worry: one of our cyclists training in Beijing started having trouble breathing after 20 minutes into a trial race. He said his muscles just didn't want to work and half-way through the 30 mile course he had to pull over and vomit; his body just shut down. Of the 47 contestants in that trial race in Beijing, 39 riders couldn't finish because they couldn't breathe. But what does this have to do with YOU in the USA?

* Polluted air isn't only found in Beijing or Los Angeles: Mexico City, London, Cleveland, Pittsburg, Chicago and St. Louis, among other cities, all have toxic air year round. Texas has serious bad air problems. In 2007, the ALA ranked **Houston 5th** and **DFW 7th in the nation for having the worst ozone-polluted air year-round**; in 2007, Tarrant county ranked 9th and Harris county 5th in the nation for ozone pollution. The EPA classifies the **DFW metroplex, San Antonio and most of southeastern Texas (Houston, Brownsville, Corpus Christi)** as areas where air quality standards are not met, in other words, **total air pollution levels (both ozone and fine particulate matter) are dangerous to humans**. It's not just "their" problem in China, Ohio, England or California, it's our problem in Texas and that's what it has to do with YOU.

*When we, whether a trained athlete or someone with respiratory problems, inhale polluted air it is **very dangerous to our respiratory tract**, damaging the air sacs in the lungs. **Exposure can inflame lung tissue** and cause respiratory infections, especially for people with asthma, allergies or COPD; it causes your voice to get raspy and your chest to hurt.

* There are many aspects of world wide air pollution we individually can't control, but there are ways **you can protect yourself** and your family in summer heat when ozone levels climb higher and our air is even more polluted.

* Each morning **1) check the Air Quality Index (AQI)** on weather shows or sign up on the TX Commission Environmental Quality site for free email alerts, <http://www.tceq.state.tx.us> **2) learn the color guide for the Air Quality Index (AQI):** Green = good air quality, no damaging affects; Yellow = moderate air quality, but unusually sensitive people should limit their time outdoors; Orange = unhealthy for sensitive groups, including those physically active and those with asthma or other respiratory diseases - limit your time outside; Red = Unhealthy air; everyone should avoid prolonged outdoor activity; Purple = Very Unhealthy – stay indoors. **3) limit exposure to polluted air even when we're not under an alert**; avoid exercising or playing outdoors during the afternoon or early evening hours when pollution is worse. Avoid lawn chores late in the day and if you have to work outdoors, wear a face mask. If you have asthma, ask your healthcare provider if using your emergency medications (albuterol) will help.

* **We all can help reduce air pollution and save money, too.** Reduce your speed not only to save gas but to reduce toxic emissions; limit driving during late afternoon and evening which reduces the amount of trapped vehicle exhaust gases. Use car pools or public transportation. Don't let your car idle in traffic; turn off the engine when you need to wait more than 15 seconds. Avoid using gas lawn mowers late afternoons; don't fuel up late afternoon or early evening – gas fumes escape the nozzle more easily and less gas goes into your tank – it evaporates; keep your engine tuned and tires inflated. Avoid using barbecue grills on bad air days. Use cleaning and painting products that are environmentally safe. Use energy efficient light bulbs. Increase the temperature settings for your air conditioning. Dirty air is everyone's problem and **you can make a difference**. For more information on indoor and outdoor air quality, contact AAFA-TX.

Upcoming Free AAFA-TX Programs: **1) June 7** "Diagnosing & Managing Asthma 2008" La Quinta Arlington; a CME symposium worth 4.5 cat. 1 credits for medical professionals. Faculty: William Lumry, MD, William Neaville, MD, Robert Rogers, MD, Eric Schmitt, MD, Gerald Moore, MD, moderator. Registration is complete. **2) June 18** "Tools To Manage Asthma & Allergies" Wellness Program, ExxonMobil, Las Colinas, Dr. John Meiser, faculty. For more info, write info@aafatexas.org

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