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## Area reaches clean-air milestone

Ozone reduction might help draw businesses

By James Bruggers  
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The Courier-Journal

It's getting easier for people to breathe in Louisville.

Monitoring during the past three years shows the metro area meets the national standard for ground-level ozone -- or smog, a lung-irritating pollutant that has plagued the region for decades.

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In response, officials in Indiana and Kentucky plan to ask the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to declare Jefferson, Oldham and Bullitt counties in Kentucky, as well as Clark and Floyd counties in Indiana, in compliance with a national ozone standard set in 1997.

The region will agree to cap emissions of pollutants that cause ozone at 2003 levels,

officials said.

The EPA can take as long as 18 months to decide, but if the agency does change Louisville's status, it will become easier for the area to attract new businesses and expand existing ones.

Government and industry officials called the achievement a milestone for a region that was among the first in the United States to be found in violation of the Clean Air Act of 1970.

Wilbur Walker, a retired office manager who lives in eastern Louisville, said he has noticed the air is cleaner but thinks the community needs to remain vigilant to ensure the health of residents like him. Walker said doctors removed about a quarter of his lungs a decade ago because of emphysema, which he attributes to smoking.

"I like to see people get healthy and stay healthy," he said. "Cleaner air is part of that."

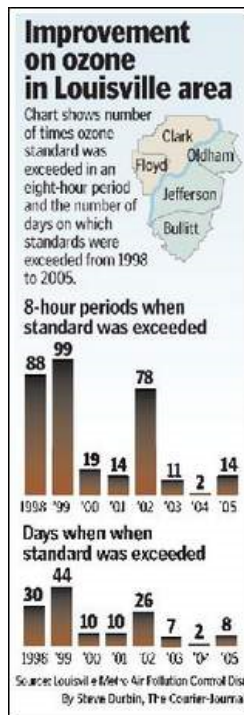
A change in status could also give Louisville bragging rights over some cities with which it competes economically, and which continue to exceed the ozone standard, including Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Nashville and Memphis, according to a draft report from the Louisville Metro Air Quality Task Force.

"We have achieved some very substantial progress in air quality through local efforts over the years," said Art Williams, director of the Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control District.

### Still work to be done

Achieving that milestone, however, doesn't mean Louisville's air is pristine.

Williams acknowledged that Louisville still has problems with two other types of air pollution. It violates the national standard for potentially deadly fine particles, and the city has documented unsafe levels of certain toxic



### QUICK TAKE

**What is ozone?** A gas created by a chemical reaction of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds in the presence of sunlight. The ingredients for ozone come from such sources as vehicle exhaust and industrial emissions.

**Its effects:** Ozone can damage lungs. Symptoms include wheezing, coughing, pain when breathing deeply and breathing difficulties during outdoor activities.

**What's next:** The Louisville Metro Air Quality Task Force meets at 2 p.m. today at the Air Pollution Control District board room, 850 Barret Ave., to discuss a report and recommendations on future pollution reductions.

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chemicals.

Some residents said they have noticed improvements but recognize that the city needs to strive to do better.

Barry Zalph, who runs a bicycling advocacy group and who peddled 6,600 miles last year, said car exhaust makes his chest feel constricted. He urged Louisville leaders to press for more improvements.

"Federal standards are meant as a floor, not a ceiling," he said. "Locally, we should never be satisfied with meeting just the bare minimum of the law."

The air task force's draft report includes recommendations for further work toward lower ozone levels.

At a meeting this afternoon, the task force will consider retaining current air programs while adding new ones, such as developing plans that would encourage shorter commutes, improving traffic flow, enforcing speed limits and offering free vehicle inspections.

"You need a margin of safety," said Larry Palmer, an urban health policy professor at the University of Louisville and a member of the task force. "The community cannot rely on the (EPA) regulations to protect public health."

A margin of safety would help the area economically, said Maker's Mark President Bill Samuels, another member of the task force and chairman of Greater Louisville Inc., the metro area chamber of commerce.

It could prevent the region from falling out of compliance in the future, making it harder to recruit businesses. That would be more likely if weather conducive to high ozone levels -- intense summer sunshine and heat -- returns in the coming years.

### Power-plant changes key

Kathy Watson, head of the air-quality branch of the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, and other officials credited the improvements largely to federal requirements that forced significant cuts in pollution from coal-fired power plants.

Both Cinergy, which operates power plants in Indiana, and Louisville Gas & Electric have reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides.

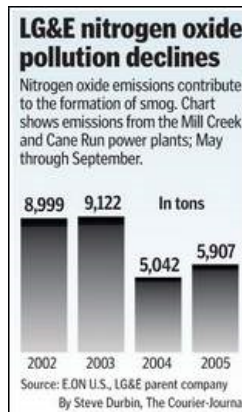
Cinergy officials said nitrogen oxide emissions from the company's two plants that affect the Louisville area have been cut from 22,000 tons in 2000 to 5,700 tons in 2005. LG&E's two plants in the area have made cuts from 8,999 tons in 2002 to 5,907 tons last year, said Laura Douglas, spokeswoman for E.ON U.S., LG&E's German-owned parent company.

In addition to improvements at power plants, Watson said, air quality has been helped by new, cleaner-burning vehicle engines, cleaner-burning fuels and other local efforts. One such program in Louisville offers rebates for recycling gasoline-burning lawn-care equipment and purchasing electric replacements, said Jon Trout, assistant director of the air district.

Reporter James Bruggers can be reached at (502) 582-4645.

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"We have achieved some very substantial progress in air quality," said Art Williams, director of the air-pollution control district.

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