

Regional update

Volunteer smog patrols reveal pollution hotspots

Severe asthma drove Dick Groeber to retire from postal work in his forties. That and his interest in meteorology led him to volunteer three years ago to measure ozone smog levels in his hometown outside Dayton, OH.

His findings and those of other Environmental Defense volunteers show that EPA monitoring stations may be failing to detect the highest levels of pollution.

Our study was launched with local groups in Atlanta, Baltimore, Buffalo, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton and Washington, DC. We equipped the volunteers with sophisticated handheld monitors. The readings in their neighborhoods often were higher than the closest EPA monitors.

EPA requires only two monitors in large urban areas, and some suburban areas have none. That might suffice if

Health risks may be higher than the public realizes.

ozone were constant across a region, but our study shows the system misses local variations caused by shifting “pockets” of smog. The law requires cities with smog problems to reduce pollution to combat asthma and other lung ailments. “In some areas, public health may be at higher risk than citizens realize,” says our ozone project manager Halley Rosen.

The findings are important as states prepare to inform EPA this month what areas exceed stricter new smog limits. “Higher standards won’t truly protect the public until government monitors provide an accurate picture of the pollution problem,” says Rosen.



What’s the smog level in your hometown?

Jennie Woodcock/Corbis



John Rae

Our marine advocate Richard Charter helped win bipartisan support, blocking more offshore rigs.

A much-needed respite for California’s fragile coast

When the Bush administration announced plans last year to buy back undeveloped offshore oil leases to protect Florida’s Gulf coast, Californians asked for equal treatment. The administration refused, and further asserted that the state had no jurisdiction over existing leases in federal waters. “Florida opposes coastal drilling,” stated Interior Secretary Gale Norton. “California does not.”

But after failing to prevail in the lower courts, the administration has relented, ending its legal fight with California over the state’s right to review offshore drilling plans. Ever since the tragic 1969 oil spill off Santa Barbara fouled California beaches, the state’s elected officials from both parties have vehemently opposed new offshore drilling.

The court case involved undeveloped leases for 36 tracts off central California. California wanted the right to

review oil company requests for lease extensions to make sure they complied with state coastal protection plans.

“This precedent-setting decision validates the right of coastal states to protect their shores,” says our marine advocate Richard Charter.

Environmental Defense joined the case in support of

State wins right to review drilling plans

the state’s position. We’re now pushing for an amendment to the Senate energy bill to prohibit seismic testing and other exploratory activities in areas protected by a moratorium on offshore drilling.

Says Charter: “We’re heartened by the bipartisan support we’ve received for protecting sensitive coastal areas.”