

by Wendy Koch

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Mar 09, 2011

Wyoming's smog exceeds Los Angeles' due to gas drilling

About Wendy Koch

Wendy Koch has been a reporter and editor at USA TODAY since 1998, covering politics and social issues. She's begun a quest to build the most eco-friendly home her budget allows. She'll share her experience and give you tips for greening your home. More about Wendy



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By Wendy Koch, USA TODAY

Updated 2011-03-09 11:52 AM



CAPTION By Mead Gruver, AP

Rural Wyoming, known for breathtaking vistas, now has worse smog than Los Angeles because of its boom in natural gas drilling.

Residents who live near the gas fields in the state's western corner are complaining of watery eyes, shortness of breath and bloody noses, reports the Associated Press. The cause is clearer than the air: local ozone levels recently exceeded the highest levels recorded in the biggest U.S. cities last year.

Preliminary data show the region's ozone levels last Wednesday got as high as 124 parts per billion, which is two-thirds higher than the Environmental Protection Agency's maximum healthy limit of 75 parts per billion and above the worst day in Los Angeles all last year, 114 parts per billion, AP reports. On March 1, the ozone levels hit 116 parts per billion.

Last year, too, Wyoming's gas-drilling area had days when its ozone levels exceeded Los Angeles' worst for 2009.

Yet, the Cowboy State is prospering. It has one of the nation's lowest unemployment rates, 6.4 percent, and is expected to run a budget surplus this year.

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"They're trading off health for profit. It's outrageous. We're not a Third World country," said Elaine Crumpley, a retired science teacher who lives just outside Pinedale, Wyo., told the AP.

In the Upper Green River Basin, at least one daycare center called off outdoor recess, and state officials urged the elderly, children and people with respiratory conditions to avoid strenuous or extended outdoor activity.

Gas industry officials say they're trying to curb smog by reducing truck traffic and switching to drilling rigs with pollution control equipment, and they report fewer emissions contributing to smog than in 2008, reports the AP. On Monday, Gov. Matt Mead discussed with state regulators and industry representatives what else companies can do.

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Everybody in Wyoming should get an aerosol spray can and empty it in a day. Ozone will be depleted. Problem solved!

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