

ON THE AIR

Fall
2019

A Newsletter about
Clean Air. Provided
by Spokane Regional
Clean Air Agency.

“Air Has No Borders” connects art and shared experiences of poor air quality

During the month of August, a light in Kolva-Sullivan Gallery shone green, yellow, orange or red to indicate the hourly air quality in Spokane County. As each day concluded, a colored dot was added to a windowpane to depict the day’s overall air quality. Soon, 31 dots represented August’s air.

“Air Has No Borders” was an installation created by Nicole Chochrek. She came to Spokane through Laboratory Art + Residency – a program that supports artists by providing time and space to create interactive works across the city.

As an interdisciplinary artist, Chochrek uses visual and performative frameworks to explore contemporary issues and environmental disparities. In this case, she looked closely at how wildfire smoke impacts Spokane and its community.

Chochrek is no stranger to poor air quality. Originally from Denton, Texas, an area where air pollution has impacted the region for many years, Chochrek pulled from her personal experiences when creating the installation and tracing wildfire smoke impacts back to Spokane.

“I was invested in understanding the impact our environment has on our health, more importantly, how the pollutants we can't see affect us,” explained Chochrek. “Recurring questions that arise are ‘what are the long-term implications?’ and ‘how can we improve the health and safety of our communities?’”

“I was able to talk to people in the community who had lost their homes or been evacuated, people who had to leave town because they don’t have AC and keeping the windows open is not an option,” Chochrek said. “I heard from people who changed how they commuted to work, to people who wrote songs about poor air quality.”

As the installation concluded and stories had been shared, Chochrek became increasingly aware that everyone is impacted by the air we breathe. ■



Conversations and art intersect at the “Air Has No Borders” art installation last August at the Kolva-Sullivan Gallery in downtown Spokane.

Throughout the installation, the community was invited to share their stories of how they’ve been impacted by fire season. While this year Spokane didn’t see large impacts from wildfire smoke, the past few years were still at the top of mind.



Window panes at the downtown art gallery represent Spokane’s air quality during August.

50 years of clean air progress: 1969-2019

Part 3 of 3: A look back at Spokane's air quality 2000 - present

Spokane drops off the "dirty air" list

Perhaps the biggest milestone for the agency happened in the summer of 2005. In a small ceremony at Riverfront Park, an official from EPA stood before a small gathering of state and local officials and declared the Spokane area in attainment with the health-based, national air quality standards. EPA's move to reclassify our area from "nonattainment" to "attainment" set in motion a 20 year commitment to continue programs that helped us achieve cleaner air. Our second, 10-year maintenance plan is currently underway.

Recognizing the work of businesses

In 2004 we launched our annual Clean Air Award to recognize businesses that consistently demonstrate a commitment to reduce air emissions. Award recipients include Fairchild Air Force Base, Avista Corp., TransCanada, Huntwood Industries, Inland Empire Paper Co., Ross Printing, Fiber-Tech Industries, CXT Inc, Beacon Cleaners & Laundry, Ed's Premier Auto Body, Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center & Children's Hospital, Central Pre-Mix, ExxonMobil-Spokane Terminal, Spokane International Airport, Eastern Washington University, and Gonzaga University.

New health benchmarks for fine particles

In 2006, EPA adopted a new, more health-protective standard for fine particles (PM_{2.5}) that come mainly from combustion-related activities. To meet the new standard, a wood burning curtailment program was modified to restrict the use of wood burning stoves and fireplaces at a lower pollution level than what had been previously used.

In 2007, the EPA finalized regulations to reduce air toxics from mobile sources. The standards significantly cut air toxics by lowering benzene content in gasoline, reducing exhaust emissions from passenger vehicles operated at cold temperatures, and reducing emissions that evaporate from portable fuel containers.

Goodbye SCAPCA, hello Spokane Clean Air

In 2008, after nearly 40 years, it was time to say goodbye to our name, Spokane County Air Pollution Control Authority, aka SCAPCA, and embrace a new name that better reflects the agency direction, mission and programs. The Spokane Regional Clean Air Agency (Spokane Clean Air), was adopted along with a new logo and tag line, "*Working with you for clean air.*" The tag line promotes the idea that our communities and our residents share our role in improving and protecting air quality.

We've come a long way; work yet to be done

Spokane isn't the only county to dramatically improve its air quality. Between 1970 and 2017, the combined emissions of the six common air pollutants dropped by 73 percent across the country. This progress occurred while the U.S. economy continued to grow, Americans drove more miles and population and energy use increased.

But our work isn't done. As the region grows, so do the emissions in our air shed. Efforts to improve air quality and to stay in compliance with health-based standards must continue. We have new challenges as well. Recent summers have been shrouded in smoke from wildfires burning near and far. Smoke affects us all, especially our most vulnerable residents.

We do know this. Clean air is a precious resource and we'll continue our work with residents, businesses and our partner agencies. Striving for good air quality now and into the future is well worth the effort. ■



Personal reflections on 50 years

Conversations about air quality: past and present

To commemorate our 50th year in service, we held a tree planting ceremony at Riverfront Park followed by a reception at the Chase Gallery. At the reception, we were able to catch up with some former agency employees. Here are a few things they had to say:

Mabel McInerney, Staff member, 1970-2000

“It’s wonderful to be able to breathe clean air. When I first started with the agency, air pollution was very evident—you could feel it, you could smell it and you could see it. It really was a dirty environment. To have it so beautiful now just shows how much progress has been made over the years.”

“I’m the most proud of how the community came together as a whole. Everybody did their part because everybody wanted clean air. So, everyone participated in doing a little bit at a time to clean up the air.”



Mabel (Caine) McInerney served in several positions with the agency, including Acting Director. She retired from the agency in 2000.



Doug Pottratz above and back in 1974 when he was showing air pollution trapped on particulate filters at Expo '74

“We did not anticipate a ceremony like this 50 years ago. We knew we had a lot of work in front of us. But we’ve come a long way. The fact that we are in compliance with air quality standards has a lot of health benefits but it also has a lot of economic benefits to our community.”

Doug Pottratz, staff member, 1971-1978



Spokane Artist Chris Bovey was commissioned to design a poster commemorating the 50th anniversary of Spokane Clean Air.



Woodstove Change-Out Program Expands Countywide

New this fall, all Spokane County residents are eligible for financial incentives to replace their old wood burning stoves and fireplace inserts with cleaner options.

The wood stove change-out program is to improve air quality by reducing harmful wood smoke. Heating with wood is the chief cause of air pollution during winter. The program is funded by a grant from the Washington State Department of Ecology.

Under the new program, the incentive amounts have increased as follows: \$700/wood, \$1,000/pellet, \$1,250/gas, and \$1,500/mini-split, ductless heat pump.

Program details and application forms are at SpokaneCleanAir.org. ■

Summer of '19: Best air quality in three years

Spokane's 2019 wildfire smoke season started off with

Season	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012
# Days over health-based standards	2	13	16	0	13	1	0	2

a roar and went out with a whimper. On June 4, Spokane received its first glimpse of wildfire smoke. While there were a few elevated hours, the smoke quickly dispersed and air quality headed back to the good range.

This brief and early smoke episode was a reminder for many that wildfire smoke can rapidly deteriorate air quality. To help the Spokane community prepare for the possibility of wildfire smoke, many local agencies, including Spokane Clean Air, Spokane Regional Health District and Greater Spokane Emergency Management came together to promote *Smoke Ready Communities Day*. The day focused on resources and ways to help the community prepare for poor air quality events.

After a quiet July, wildfire smoke returned to Spokane. On August 5 and August 7, the Air Quality Index 24-hour averaged "Orange/Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups." This smoke was primarily brought in due to the Williams Flats fire on the Colville Reservation.

Once the smoke from the Williams Flats fire cleared, Spokane returned to predominantly good air quality for the remainder of the summer. What does this mean for wildfire smoke impacts in the coming years? Primarily the importance of being prepared and having plans in place if air quality rapidly deteriorates. While we may have years where only a few days are impacted, we may also have years where the smoke hangs heavy in our area for an extended amount of time. ■

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