EPA United States Environmental Protection Agency

School Flag Program: Fact Sheet

WHAT IS THE SCHOOL FLAG PROGRAM?

The Flag Program uses colored flags based on U.S. EPA's Air Quality Index (AQI) to notify teachers, coaches, students, and others about outdoor air quality conditions. Schools raise a colored flag each day that corresponds to their local air quality forecast.

WHY WAS THE FLAG PROGRAM DEVELOPED?

The purpose of this program is to create public awareness of outdoor air quality conditions so children can continue to exercise while protecting their health when air quality is in unhealthy ranges. Children are at greater risk from air pollution because their lungs are still developing and they breathe more air per pound of body weight than adults. Even when air quality is unhealthy, exercise can be continued indoors for children who have symptoms outdoors. Recommendations for outdoor activities on poor air quality days can be found at www.airnow.gov under the School Flag Program.

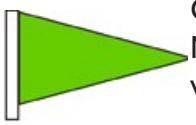
WHAT IS THE AIR QUALITY INDEX?

The AQI is a guide for reporting daily air quality. It indicates how clean or polluted the air is and identifies health effects. EPA uses the AQI for five common air pollutants: ground-level ozone, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. For each pollutant, EPA has established national air quality standards to protect against harmful health effects.

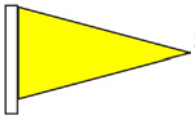
CONTACT Betty Ann
(908) 310-9539
Bettyann@breathetestedair.com

WHAT DO THE COLORS MEAN?

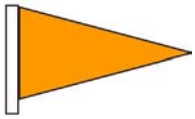
The Flag Program uses green, yellow, orange, red and purple flags. These colors correspond to the AQI.



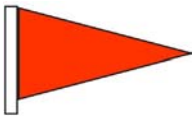
Green means the air quality is good. No health impacts are expected when air quality is in this range.



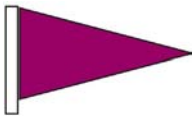
Yellow means air quality is acceptable. Unusually sensitive people should consider limiting prolonged outdoor exertion.



Orange means air quality is unhealthy for sensitive groups -- people with lung disease such as asthma, children and older adults should limit prolonged outdoor exertion.



Red means air quality is unhealthy. Sensitive groups should avoid prolonged outdoor exertion. Everyone else should limit prolonged outdoor exertion.



Purple means air quality is very unhealthy. Sensitive groups should avoid all outdoor exertion. Everyone else should limit outdoor exertion.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHAT COLOR FLAG TO USE?

Check the AQI to know what color flag to use at www.epa.gov/airnow. Many cities provide an air quality forecast via e-mail by subscribing to: www.airnow.gov/enviroflash.

Office of Air and Radiation(6301A)
April 2011
EPA-456/F-11-004