



# Air Quality Flag Program Handbook

presented by ADEQ's  
Air Quality Division





# INTRODUCTION

## Helping Communities Become More Air Aware

ADEQ's Air Quality Flag Program helps protect the health of our children, workers, families, friends and neighbors by providing Arizona communities with resources to inform residents about:

- Local outdoor air quality conditions
- How air pollution impacts health
- Actions we can take to protect ourselves
- Ways we can improve the quality of the air we breathe
- The program is especially important for older citizens and children, including teens, and those with asthma or other respiratory illnesses, whose risk of experiencing health issues from air pollution is greater.



## How Does It Work?

The program provides participating facilities with educational materials and colored flags that notify communities about local air quality conditions and correspond with the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Air Quality Index (AQI). By sharing educational materials with residents and flying the flags in a visible spot, the facilities help alert people to that particular day's air quality, so they know when and how to modify their outdoor activities.

## Have Questions?

Visit [azdeq.gov/FlagProgram](http://azdeq.gov/FlagProgram) to find answers, or reach out to your Program Coordinator at [airqualityflagprogram@azdeq.gov](mailto:airqualityflagprogram@azdeq.gov).

## Step One: Get Your Flags

Contact your Air Quality Flag Program coordinator to obtain flags for your facility by emailing [airqualityflagprogram@azdeq.gov](mailto:airqualityflagprogram@azdeq.gov) or calling 602-771-2231.



## Step Two: Educate and Inform

1. Choose a date to begin flying your flags
2. Inform students, staff, contractors and the community of the start date
3. Educate them about what they can do on days when air quality is unhealthy

Visit [azdeq.gov/FlagProgram](http://azdeq.gov/FlagProgram) to download:

- Posters to print and hang at your facility
- Welcome message template to educate parents and employees
- Outdoor activity guide
- Training video

...and more!



## Step Three: Plan a Daily Process

Work with staff to designate roles and responsibilities. Each morning, someone should check the daily air quality forecast for your area at [azdeq.gov/Forecasting](http://azdeq.gov/Forecasting), checking for the flags at the bottom of the page. Here's an example of what this section looks like:



## Step Four: Fly Your Flag

As part of the daily process, assign a staff member (or several staff using an alternating schedule) to fly the corresponding flag from a highly visible location.



**Simply continue your daily process to help keep your community air aware.**

# HOW TO PROTECT SENSITIVE INDIVIDUALS

## Check the Hourly Forecast | [azdeq.gov/Forecasting](http://azdeq.gov/Forecasting)

ADEQ provides hourly forecasting for certain areas of the state. Find out expected air quality conditions and get advice about what people can do to protect their health, especially for children, seniors and people with respiratory problems.

## Reduce Outdoor Activity

People breathe harder when they are active for longer periods of time or while doing more intense activities. This causes more pollution to enter the lungs. On days when the orange or red flags are flying, children and adults can reduce the pollution entering their lungs by reducing strenuous outdoor activities and remaining indoors during times of the day when pollutants levels are at their highest (see hourly forecasts).

## Increase Active Time Indoors

Encourage indoor activities that keep people moving, including aerobic exercise and involving muscle and bone strengthening components (e.g. jumping, skipping, sit-ups or pushups). If a gymnasium or open space is accessible, promote activities that use equipment, such as cones, hula-hoops and sports balls. If restricted to a classroom or office, encourage students and staff to come up with fun ways to get everyone moving. Teachers and recess supervisors can work with PE teachers to identify additional indoor activities at school.

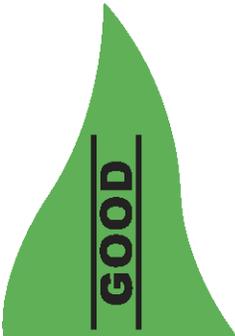
## Have an Asthma Action Plan

Air pollution can make asthma symptoms worse and trigger attacks. Symptoms of asthma include coughing, shortness of breath, wheezing and chest tightness. Even people who do not have asthma could experience these symptoms when exposed to unhealthy levels of air pollution.

An asthma action plan is a written plan for the daily management of asthma including medication plans, control of triggers and how to address worsening symptoms. These should be developed in cooperation with the individual's doctor. Visit [cdc.gov/asthma/tools\\_for\\_control.htm](http://cdc.gov/asthma/tools_for_control.htm) for more information and to download asthma action plan samples.

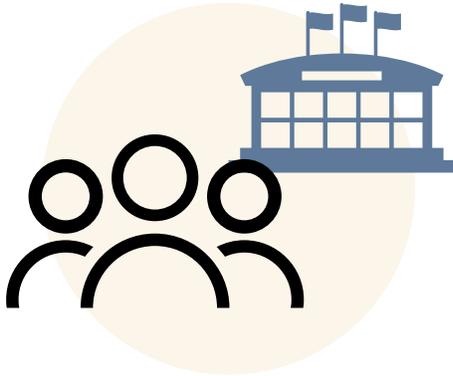
Regular physical activity promotes health and fitness. The table below shows what the flag colors mean, including when and how outdoor physical activity may be modified based on the air quality. Following these guidelines can help protect the health of all Arizonans from the impacts of air pollution. Ideas for school classroom activities on less healthy days can be found online at [azdeq.gov/FlagProgram/Toolkit](http://azdeq.gov/FlagProgram/Toolkit).

*Those with asthma, follow your asthma action plan and keep quick relief medicine handy.*

Flag Color	Air Quality	Sensitive Groups	General Public
	Air quality is good.	Weather permitting, it's a great day to be active outside.	
	Air quality is fair.	Unusually sensitive people should consider reducing prolonged outdoor exertion. Watch for symptoms such as coughing or shortness of breath.	It's a good day to be active outside.
	Air quality is approaching unhealthy.	Sensitive people including children, older adults, pregnant women and those with heart or lung disease should take more breaks, lower the activity's intensity and watch for symptoms.	It's OK to be active outside, especially for short periods.
	Air quality is unhealthy.		For everyone working or playing outdoors, take more breaks and do less intense activity. Consider rescheduling longer or more intense outdoor activities or moving them indoors.

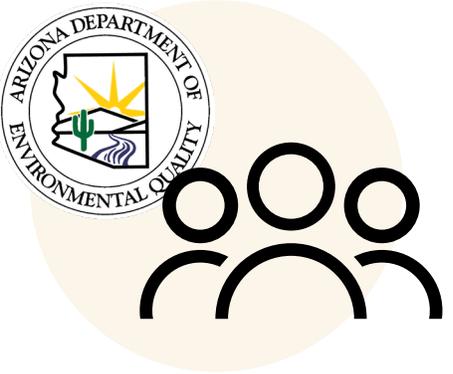
# ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As a Flag Program participant, you've become a unique leader in your community. And we are here to help.



## Your duties:

- Lead on-site program implementation
- Train on-site staff involved in daily process
- Fly the flags on-site according to daily air quality forecast
- Distribute Toolkit materials to the community
- Share program information with eligible peers



## ADEQ is here to support you by:

- Leading the program statewide
- Training Site Coordinators (you)
- Providing flags and Toolkit materials
- Overseeing promotion statewide
- Providing general support to sites

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## How long can people stay outside when the air quality is unhealthy?

There isn't an exact amount of time. The worse the air quality, the more important it is to take breaks, participate in less intense activities and watch for symptoms. Remember that people with asthma will be more sensitive to unhealthy air.

## What time of day is air pollution most prevalent?

Ozone pollution is often worse on long, sunny days, especially during the afternoon and early evening. Particle pollution can be high any time of day. Check the hourly forecast at [azdeq.gov/Forecasting](http://azdeq.gov/Forecasting) to plan your day.

*Understanding the Hourly Forecast:*

[http://static.azdeq.gov/aqd/forecast/hourly\\_forecast\\_tips.pdf](http://static.azdeq.gov/aqd/forecast/hourly_forecast_tips.pdf)

## If people stay inside because of unhealthy outdoor air quality, can they still be active?

It depends on which pollutant is causing the problem:

- Ozone pollution — If windows are closed, the amount of ozone should be much lower indoors, so it is OK to keep moving.
- Particle pollution — If the building has a forced air heating or cooling system that filters out particles, the amount of particle pollution should be lower indoors and it is OK to keep moving. It is important that the particle filtration system is installed.



Publication number: TM-18-29

For translations or other communications aids, please email the Title VI Coordinator at [Bingham.Ian@azdeq.gov](mailto:Bingham.Ian@azdeq.gov).  
Para traducciones u otras ayudas de comunicación, envíe un correo electrónico al Coordinador del Título VI al [Bingham.Ian@azdeq.gov](mailto:Bingham.Ian@azdeq.gov).