

# **AIR QUALITY ADVISORY COUNCIL**

## **Minutes – October 4, 2011**

**Members/alternates present:** Bert Chessin, Guy Hanson, Mark Loeffelbein, Bill Flanery, Patricia Hogan, Katie Lane, Sue Spanke

**Members/alternates absent:** Beth Berlin, John Garberson, Jan Hoem, George Hart, Tova Sardot, Garon Smith

**Staff:** Sarah Coefield

**Public:** Tim Wright, Libby Steigers, Jim Habeck

**1. Sarah Coefield called the meeting to order.**

**2. Excused absences recognized:** Beth Berlin, John Garberson, Jan Hoem, George Hart, Tova Sardot and Garon Smith were absent.

**3. Agenda approved**

**4. Public comment on non-agenda items: n/a**

**5. Article presentation**

Guy Hanson presented the Draft Missoula County Community Health Assessment 2011 from the Oct. 4<sup>th</sup> Community Health Assessment Meeting. Guy solicited comments from the Council for the air quality section of the assessment. The group discussed the assessment, and suggested adding a sentence noting that Missoula County is currently in attainment for PM2.5, but is looking at Seeley Lake, which has high winter particulate levels. Katie Lane suggested adding the top three sources of air pollution in Missoula, and Sue Spanke recommended mentioning that different pollution sources come into play at different times of the year. Guy suggested that the assessment should acknowledge that the EPA excludes natural events such as wildfires when determining an area's attainment status.

**6. Presentation: Wildfire Air Quality Updates: the Process, Predictions, and Lessons Learned – Sarah Coefield, Air Quality Specialist**

Sarah Coefield gave a presentation on the air quality updates she put together during wildfire season. Wildfire smoke presents a health threat to Missoula County residents, but because it is highly variable by location and time, staying on top of smoke concentrations across the county can take a lot of effort. Air quality updates began on August 23<sup>rd</sup> and were updated twice daily throughout the wildfire season. The health-based advisories were issued on the Air Quality Hotline (258-3600), on the Current Air Quality webpage and to an e-mail notification list. Data for the updates were gathered using the "Today's Air" website, which provides near real-time data for PM2.5 concentrations at Boyd Park, Frenchtown and Seeley Lake. During the 41 Complex Fire, Sarah also paid particular attention to the Hamilton monitor, as smoke flows downhill to Missoula from Ravalli County. Data were also gathered using visual assessments, because the wildfire smoke isn't always going to be near a monitor. Sarah drove around the county to check out smoke concentrations by gauging visibility. This was particularly important in areas near the wildfires but far from monitors, such as Lolo and

Bonner. Fire activity maps also provided useful information by displaying which fires in the area were active over a given time period – if a fire was active overnight, there would likely be quite a bit of smoke trapped under the inversion layer. Satellite photos provided an excellent resource to show smoke around the region and provide insight into which direction smoke was headed and which fires were likely to hit the County with smoke. A smoke and fire detection website operated by NOAA also provides a good illustration of the relative thickness of smoke in a given area as well as which direction smoke it headed.

After gathering information about the local fires, smoke and particulate concentrations, Sarah would try to get a handle on whether air quality would improve or degrade in the future. This required examining wind speed and direction forecasts for Missoula’s valleys. She also looked at dispersion models and occasionally called meteorologists at the National Weather Service for further clarification. Since fire behavior directly impact smoke production, Sarah spent time going over incident reports for the local wildfires to determine if firefighting activity would include back burns or burnouts.

Throughout the day, Sarah would monitor smoke behavior, particulate concentrations, smoke density and weather conditions. If conditions worsened during the day, she would post an additional, mid-day update.

Following the presentation, Sarah answered the group’s questions, such as how the Health Department advised schools during wildfire season. (Sarah said she stayed in contact with schools and advised them to use visibility to gauge air quality at their specific location. Schools were also provided with a set of activity guidelines based on smoke density.) The group also discussed additional ways to notify residents about air quality and setting up a network of “smoke spotters” to help determine smoke density at locations throughout the county.

## **7. Staff Report**

Sarah Coefield gave the staff report. Sarah recently passed her Registered Sanitarian exam, and she and Ben Schmidt both passed Smoke School in November. Oxyfuels season starts November 1<sup>st</sup> and the online burn permit project is still ongoing. Outdoor burning is still closed due to fire danger, but should open very soon. The Air Pollution Control Board will hold a hearing about the UM Biomass Boiler air quality permit in November.

## **8. Public Comment**

Jim Habeck pointed out the biomass boiler articles in the Missoulian and asked if there was a scenario where the boiler would cease to be the County’s responsibility and would go to the state. Sarah explained that the state has already determined that the boiler is under the County’s jurisdiction. Bert Chessin said a scenario where it could end up out of the County’s hands is if it is taken up by a court.

The group also discussed the Montana Rail Link Idling Emissions Reduction Project, which was completed this year.

## **9. Announcements, other business: N/A**

## **10. Adjourn**