

## **Change In Air Pollution Index**

By Joe Moore

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The Valley Air District says local air quality forecasts might soon get worse, even if the air is actually getting better. FM89's Joe Moore explains.

The problem is summertime ozone pollution. Last year, the valley exceeded the federal, 8-hour ozone health standard 80 times. That sounds like a lot, and it is, but it's also the lowest level on record for the region, and it's down over 25 percent since 2011.

But last October, the U.S. EPA changed the standard, based on new science on the harmful health effects of ozone, which can damage the respiratory system and cause difficulty breathing. The old limit of 75 parts per billion has been replaced with a new one of just 70 parts per billion.

All of this means the familiar air quality index that you hear on this station and others, is also getting more stringent. Some days that used to be considered "good" will now be "moderate" and some that were "moderate" may now be considered "unhealthy for sensitive groups."

Jaime Holt is with the Valley Air District. She compares it with a teacher changing the grading scale.

Holt: "It used to be that you could get an A+ if you got 90 to 100 percent on the test, now they're saying you can only get an A+ if you get 95 to 100 percent on the test. Even though they've changed the scale it doesn't really mean air quality is really any different."

She says the district is also encouraging more people to use the district's Real Time Air Advisory Network to get hourly updates on pollution levels this summer.