



CHAIR'S COMMENTS

By **Al DePaoli, Chair**

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I am honored to take on the challenge of chairing this great organization. With the Partnership) since 1999, I really believe in the things that we do and in our mission. After years of not accepting this role, I felt it was an opportunity I could embrace and I pledge to earn your faith and respect.

I hope to carry forward our past Chair's great accomplishments and continue the fantastic momentum that she has given us. Jayme Graham has taken us to a higher level of professionalism and has challenged us to run the partnership effectively and efficiently within our goals and budget. Every year, we gain more traditions and new ideas that really help improve the regions awareness and subsequent air quality. Thank you for the support throughout the years. We cannot do the outreach and education without people that volunteer the valuable

time to our mission.

As many of you know, we have a lot of potential to expand our efforts. This takes some time and a lot of motivation. Where we sometimes fall short is on the time side. We all have busy lives and thanklessly giving a few hours a month is not a small gift. Please take some time to learn about our efforts and volunteer some of your time for our worthwhile cause.

We had a fantastic summer season of outreach. While we attended many community festivals throughout southwestern Pennsylvania, this type of outreach will slow as the winter months approach. The school outreach increases exponentially with the educational programs we have planned. None of it can be accomplished without the volunteers, support from EPA, PADEP, ACHD, contractors

and others.

While we are in the midst of winter, be sure your furnace is working properly. Remember that there are proper ways to burn wood. Improperly burning wood leads to chimney fires and increased particle pollution. Learn more about the proper ways to use less wood and burn cleaner.

Check out the following websites for more tips:

<http://www.epa.gov/burnwise/bestburn.html>
<http://www.deq.idaho.gov/air-quality/burning/wood-stoves/burn-better.aspx>

Look inside the newsletter for my highlights of this year's activities. Feel free to contact me with new ideas for Partnership activities and/or to get involved in one of our existing programs.

— Al

Around town with the SW PA Air Quality Partnership



Above, Cecil Elementary students demonstrate the colors of the EPA school flag program as Rachel Fillippini, forefront, discusses their significance, during a press conference at the school in December. Below, Coach AQ cheers on the runners at the October Clean Air Dash and Festival in Southside Park, Pittsburgh.



EPA School Flag Program Off and Running

The Cecil Elementary School is the first school in Washington County to raise the air quality flag under the new educational awareness program.

The Southwest Pennsylvania Air Quality Partnership, Inc. (SPAQP) and Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP) are working with regional schools to launch the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) School Flag Program to teach parents, teachers and coaches about outdoor air quality conditions so children can continue to exercise safely outside when air quality pollution levels are in unhealthy ranges. This specific project was launched in August and hopes to continue to 25 schools by mid-2014.

The School Flag program focuses on two main air pollutants: ground-level ozone and fine particulate matter. The Southwestern Pennsylvania region experiences many days when one or both of these pollutants are at high levels. Children are particularly susceptible to air pollution, which can harm their still developing lungs and trigger asthma attacks.

We are very pleased to add Canon-Mac and Cecil Elementary as the first Washington County School to the EPA School Flag program," said Al DePaoli, SPAQP chair. "This program is an important tool for teachers and coaches who are planning outdoor activities. By educating our students, their teachers, coaches and families, we can increase the air quality awareness in our region and help protect our children who participate in sports and other outdoor exercise activities (even in the winter). If everyone is aware of the forecast, especially on the unhealthy days, we can then decide what outdoor activities will be appropriate for those in our care, like the young and elderly. Additionally, we can decide what actions we can take in our daily lives to help improve our air quality,"

As part of the School Flag Program each day, students will check the Air Quality Index (AQI) forecast, a national guide for reporting air quality, and raise a colored flag outside their school that represents the day's expected air pollution level. Based on the flag color, teachers, coaches, school personnel and parents can take actions, if necessary, to help safeguard students from exposure to unhealthy levels of air pollutants.

A green flag indicates air quality is good and poses little or no risk to health. The yellow flag signals moderate health concern, and orange means unhealthy for sensitive groups (like children, the elderly, and people with asthma). A red flag announces unhealthy air for everyone. A purple flag means the air quality is very unhealthy and everyone should avoid all outdoor activity (commonly used during local forest fires).

"It's important for children to get daily exercise, but they also need to be protected from poor air quality," said Rachel Fillippini, Executive Director of GASP.

"Children take in more air per pound of body weight, than adults, and as a result, are at a greater risk from air pollution, because their lungs are still developing. By participating in this program, schools can better arm themselves and their students with air quality information."

The School Flag Program is funded by the SPAQP and administered by GASP. Schools located in southwest Pennsylvania can participate in the program. For the 2013-14 school year, there are 25 openings for the free program on a first come, first served basis. Participating schools will receive a free set of air quality flags, grade and age appropriate lessons on air pollution, and assistance with the school specific program. Interested school administrators or teachers, who want to participate in the program, should contact schoolflag@gasp-pgh.org, or call 412-924-0604.

Share A Ride by Lisa Kay Schweyer

Holiday gifts to pay for and New Year's financial savings resolutions to keep? CommuteInfo offers a few ideas to help ease the strain on your family budget and keep more of your paycheck in your pocket.

The price of gas may not be as high as the prices last summer but it continues to be a large part of our families' expenses. Now may be a great time to "Go Green" and consider some of our region's more energy friendly ways of getting from here to there – while saving you some money.

Instead of driving solo, consider the benefits of sharing a ride. Transit, carpools and vanpools provide a way for people to get to and from common destinations while allowing sharing the costs of gas and parking expenses.

For our region's residents "...carpools and vanpools are becoming more and more of a viable option," said Lisa Kay Schweyer, the Program Developer for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission's CommuteInfo Program. She notes that once people decide and evaluate all the alternatives out there, the CommuteInfo program can help match them up with other commuters in the area, or provide helpful links and information. "Think of CommuteInfo as a restaurant menu of commuting choices," said Schweyer.

It's free to register, and benefits include informational updates and for those who join a "pool", participation in the Emergency Ride

schedules and evaluate what their own personal transport needs are, and to consider sharing their ride, even 2 or 3 days a week.

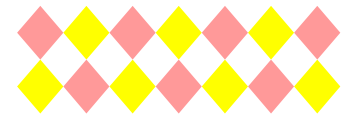
The CommuteInfo website includes a cost calculator where commuters can calculate the cost of their commute. Commuters just plug in a few numbers, and can then take a look at their actual commuting costs. The result may be surprising.

Go green and save yourself some green. Contact CommuteInfo at 1-888-819-6110 or on-line at

SCORECARD

2013
Programmable
thermostat
Rebate program
Numbers

66 rebates issued for a
total of \$3,250.



2013
Lawn Equipment
Exchange
Rebate program
Numbers

100 rebates issued for
a total of \$9,180.00.

WWW.SPAQP.ORG



Coach AQ visits Camp Huff and Puff in Jumonville in August.

Rebate programs, outreach event highlights of 2013

By Al DePaoli

From public to school outreach, the Partnership has had a busy 2013!

The Spring Workshop/ Membership Meeting, held at Phipps Conservatory, featured A Home for Fresh Air and home efficiency theme. It is always good to return to the basics every once and awhile. The event was well attended and the attendees went home with fantastic tools to make their homes more energy efficient.

Throughout the summer, Coach AQ visited numerous area festivals, getting folks to sign up to learn more about air quality and the Partnership. This is a grass roots outreach effort to provide folks with the literature and face to face discussions and it is helping us to spread our word about voluntary actions. Our partnership with Bike Pittsburgh continues to be strong. We sponsored two events that helped get our message out and gain sign-ups for the AQ forecast. The annual Venture Outdoor event has become a signature outreach event for us. We usually have small SPAQP kites to give away for those that sign up to receive the emailed forecast.

The lawn equipment exchange and rebate program was a big hit again this summer. This project is not just about getting folks to get rid of old polluting gas equipment for electric counterparts. The program is also about spreading the message that there are real things that we all can do to improve our neighborhood's air quality. Projects like this and the buzz around them generate this multiplying thought process for those that take part and those that think about it. Each year we plan to improve on the past year's results. We plan another expanded lawnmower exchange program in the spring, hoping to encourage more people to participate. In the fall, we sponsored a programmable thermostat rebate program with True Value Hardware that met with great success.

Radio advertising helps us reach out to the public with our clean air messaging. Live remote broadcasts this summer included time with WJPA at the Washington County Fair and WMBA at the Beaver County Regatta.

The 2012-13 Student Poster Contest is very successful in building excitement about air quality in our schools and giving teachers teaching materials to help get our messages across to their students. The poster contest coordinators received numerous positive feedbacks from teachers and parents while visiting the schools of the poster contest winners. The teachers and parents are appreciative of the program and educational materials as well as the prizes, which the student winners were grateful to receive. In 2012-2013, 41 schools participated; representing 2800 students in the SW PA region, and 86 posters were received. The winning class members received prizes including class gift cards, bikes and educational magic shows. This program is being continued for 2013-14 year and hopes to remain an annual event.

The EPA Flag Program is a partnership with GASP to kick off a pilot program to assist schools in setting up the flag system. The program teaches students, teachers, coaches and parents about outdoor air quality conditions so children can continue to exercise safely when air quality pollution levels are in unhealthy ranges. Photo below shows the colored flags used in the schools.

