



Air Quality Flag Program Handbook

July 2024



Clean Air, Safe Water,
Healthy Land for Everyone

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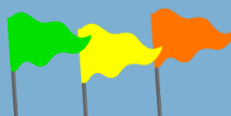
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Welcome to the Air Quality Flag Program!

Program Overview

The Air Quality Flag Program is led by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ). The program is designed to enable local communities to participate and share daily air quality forecast information by flying colorful flags that indicate the expected air quality for the day. The Flag Program provides participants with a choice of physical and/or digital flags, educational materials and resources, and an opportunity to increase the public’s awareness of air quality.

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:

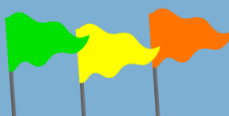
- Forecast outdoor air quality
- How air pollution impacts health
- Actions you can take to protect yourself and others
- Ways you can improve the quality of the air we breathe

The program is especially important for older residents and children, including teens, and those with asthma or other respiratory illnesses, who are at greater risk of experiencing health issues from air pollution.

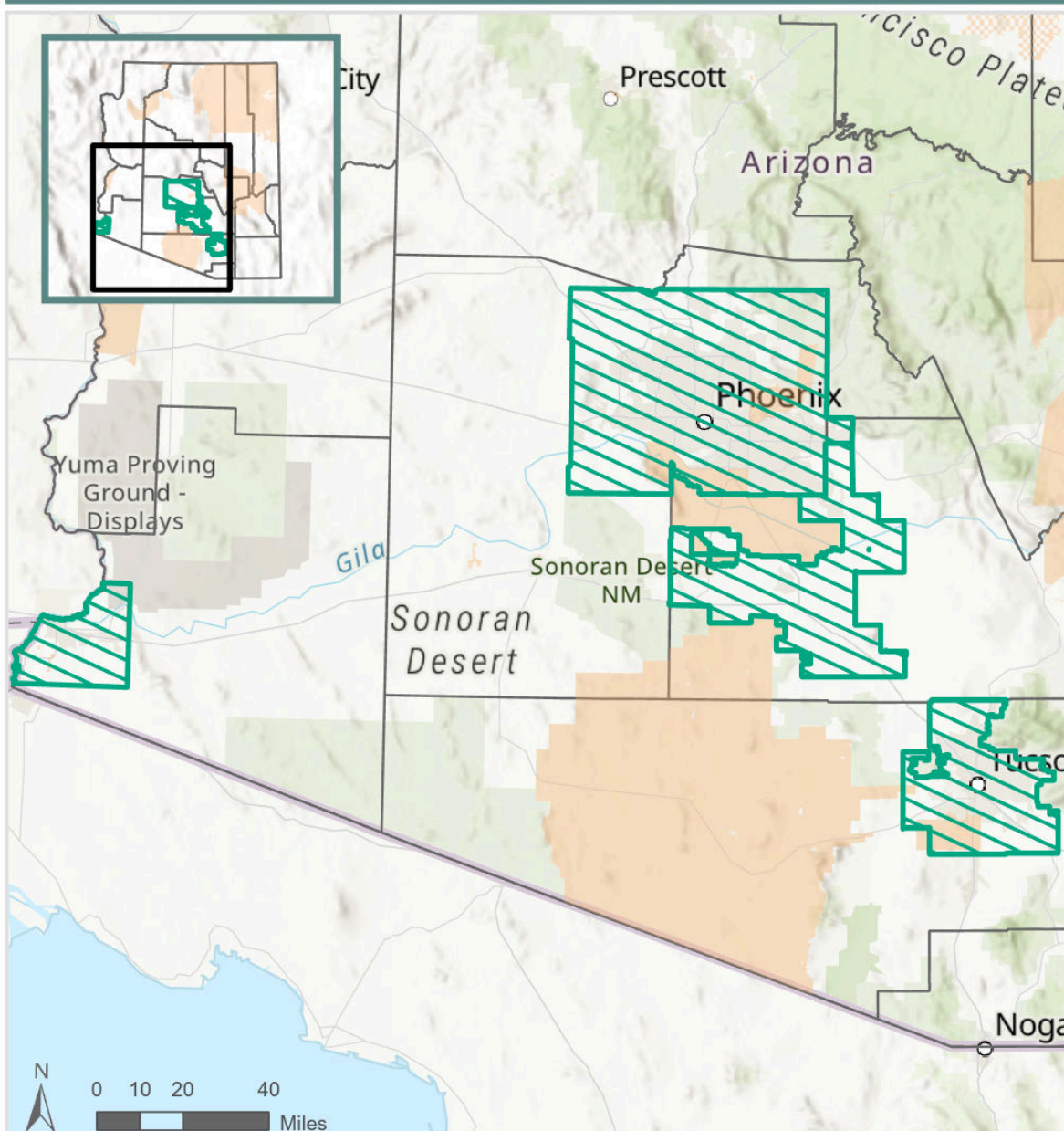
Who Can Participate?

The Flag Program is designed for specific areas where air quality either does not meet, or is at risk of not meeting, national standards. These areas must also have air quality forecasts for ozone, PM₁₀ (dust), and PM_{2.5} (smoke). See the following map for Flag Program boundaries. We encourage these organizations to participate:

- Schools
- Government Agencies and Buildings (state parks, libraries county/city buildings, etc.)
- Large Businesses (at least 50 employees)
- Tribes
- Non-Profits






ADEQ Air Quality Flag Program Boundaries



ADEQ
Arizona Department
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	Flag Program Boundaries
	Tribal Lands
	Counties



Sign Up for the Flag Program in Three Easy Steps

Step 1: Watch an Overview Video of the Program and Read this Handbook

The video highlights program details, time commitment, and responsibilities. If you don't have access to YouTube, then this Handbook will suffice. Joining the Flag Program is a way to help increase awareness of the air quality in your community | [Watch Video >](#)

Step 2: Request physical and/or digital flags

- Physical Flags — Fly the green, yellow, or orange flag at your building to reflect the daily air quality forecast. Estimated time commitment is 5 – 10 minutes per day.
- Digital Flags — Display an image of the green, yellow, or orange flag on a digital marquee to reflect the daily air quality forecast. Plain text for marquees lacking image capability are also available. Estimated time commitment is 5 minutes per day.

Before filling out the flag request form:

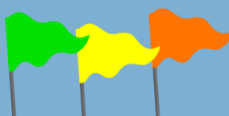
- Choose your primary flag program coordinator
 - Duties may include: overseeing the daily process of checking the forecast and ensuring the correct flag is flown/displayed; training students and/or staff in the daily process; establishing announcement routines; maintaining year-to-year continuity of the program; being point of contact for ADEQ
- Identify a secondary flag program coordinator
- Determine your preferred flag option: physical and/or digital. Note that physical flag participants are asked to commit for a minimum of one year, since flags are limited.

Request your flags by filling out our form | [View Form >](#)

Note: you will be asked your location, which may or may not meet the eligibility requirements. If you have any questions about your organization's eligibility, please feel free to reach out to us at flagprogram@azdeq.gov.

Note for Current Participants (before July 2024)

If your organization has already been participating in the Flag Program, you can still use the green, yellow, and orange flags that you already have, even if your orange flags don't say "High Pollution Advisory" as the new orange ones do. However, we are discontinuing the red flag. If you would like to request digital flags, fill out the [request form](#) and we'll get back to you!



Once you complete and submit the form, our program coordinator will review it to ensure it meets the Flag Program’s criteria. If it does, the coordinator will send you the physical and/or digital flags.

Step 3: Three Daily Duties

1. Check the Daily Air Quality Forecast and Fly the Corresponding Flag — The forecasts are typically updated by 9 a.m. Monday – Friday. Note that the Flag Program only applies to areas represented by forecasts that include ozone, PM₁₀, and PM_{2.5}. Areas with air quality forecasts that only have one or two of these air pollutants are not included in the Flag Program currently. Direct links to ADEQ’s daily air quality forecasts:

- Phoenix Air Quality Forecast | [View >](#)
- Tucson Air Quality Forecast | [View >](#)
- Yuma Air Quality Forecast | [View >](#)

Select your desired forecast, then scroll to the bottom to see the flag icons:



Flag Program participants in Pinal County, including Apache Junction, will refer to the Pinal County’s daily Air Quality Forecast, found here | [View >](#)

TIP: Bookmark your air quality forecast link for quick access!
Look at the column of the table for the current day. Fly the flag color corresponding to the highest AQI value between ozone, PM_{2.5}, and PM₁₀.

2. Educate and Inform — Once you have received your flags, physical and/or digital, and have them displayed, the next step is to educate and inform students, staff, contractors, and the community about the Air Quality Flag Program.

Air quality flags match the forecasted Air Quality Index (AQI) colors, which indicate the amount of pollution in the air and possible associated health effects. ADEQ forecasts the AQI for three major air pollutants:

1. Ozone



2. PM₁₀ (particulate matter 10 micrometers or less — dust)
3. PM_{2.5} (particulate matter 2.5 micrometers or less — smoke, soot)

Air quality can impact sensitive groups in our population, such as older citizens, children, teens, and individuals with asthma or other respiratory illnesses. The goal of the flag program is to notify the community about the daily air quality forecast, enabling them to take appropriate measures to safeguard their health.

Resources including a Flag Program poster, morning school announcements, and fact sheets are available here | [View >](#)

Understanding the Flag Colors

- **Green** — Air quality is good. Weather permitting, it’s a great day to be outside
- **Yellow** — Air quality is moderate, but may be a health concern to those who are unusually sensitive to air pollution. Watch for symptoms and reduce prolonged outdoor exertion
- **Orange: High Pollution Advisory (HPA)** — Air quality is or could be unhealthy and is forecast to be above the federal health standard. Depending on the severity of the HPA, more people may begin to experience health effects. When you see the orange flag, be sure to check the air quality forecast to see the level of estimated air pollution, and what time of day the worst air quality is expected. Watch for symptoms and reduce prolonged outdoor exertion.

What is an HPA?

ADEQ issues a High Pollution Advisory (HPA) when air quality forecasts for ozone or PM show an imminent or high probability for levels to exceed the federal health standard. HPAs encourage people to limit outdoor activities, reduce driving, and other activities that cause air pollution (leaf blowers, wood burning, etc).

3. Voluntarily Adjust Outdoor Activities, If Necessary — Based on the air quality forecast, here are some options for adjusting outdoor activities:

- **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 their lungs. On days when the orange flags are flying, children and adults can reduce the amount of pollution entering their lungs by limiting strenuous outdoor activities, or being less active outdoors. For more information on which times of the day are expected to have the highest levels of pollution, view the air quality forecast for your location.



- **Consider Moving Activities Indoors**

If outdoor pollution is elevated, consider moving activities indoors. For instance, if dust is visibly present in the area, or if you smell smoke, it might be better to go indoors, where dust and/or smoke are likely lower. However, even clear, sunny days don't necessarily mean good air quality, since ozone, an invisible pollutant, could be elevated. Therefore, refer to the air quality forecast for your location to see if ozone is a concern, and consider planning activities around that.

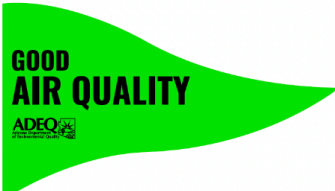


- **Have an Asthma Action Plan**

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/living-with/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/asthma/living-with/index.html) for more information and to download asthma action plan samples.

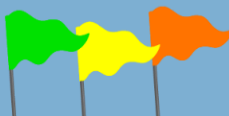
Outdoor Activity Guide for Flag Program Participants

Regular physical activity promotes health and fitness. The table shows when and how to modify outdoor physical activity based on the forecast Air Quality Index (AQI). This guidance can help protect the health of all Arizonans from the impacts of air pollution. For more information, visit: azdeq.gov/FlagProgram. You can also view the air quality forecasts here: azdeq.gov/forecast.

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

Flag Color	Air Quality	Sensitive Groups	General Public
 <p>GOOD AIR QUALITY ADEQ</p>	Air quality is good.	Weather permitting, it's a great day to be active outside.	
 <p>MODERATE AIR QUALITY ADEQ</p>	Air quality is moderate.	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.
 <p>HIGH POLLUTION ADVISORY ADEQ</p>	Air quality is or could be unhealthy.	Sensitive people including children, older adults, pregnant women and those with heart or lung disease should take more breaks, lower outdoor activity intensity and watch for symptoms.	It may be OK to be active outside, but consider reducing prolonged outdoor activities. Check the air quality forecast for more details.

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Maintaining the Program (for participants)

Thank you for participating in the Air Quality Flag Program! To maintain an effective outreach and educational program, it is important that staff changes are communicated. Please reach out to the Flag Program coordinator anytime if:

- You need a replacement flag
- You have identified a new primary or secondary flag program coordinator
- Need assistance or resources

ADEQ will reach out, at least annually, to gather feedback and answer questions you may have. Also, feel free to provide feedback about the program at any time! Together, we can make our communities more aware of the air quality!

Opting Out

Should your work commitments become too demanding, we offer an option to opt out of the Air Quality Flag Program. By returning your physical flags, this will open up opportunities for others to participate. For further information, please contact the program coordinator. Thank you.

Located Outside of the Flag Program Boundaries?

If you are located outside of the Flag Program Boundaries, ADEQ created a Community Air Quality Toolkit, which explains air quality for areas where ADEQ forecasts only one or two pollutants | [View the Community Air Quality Toolkit >](#)

Contact Us

[Email >](#)

