

MSI Air Quality Forum

Mountain Studies Institute 2009 air quality forum on August 26 focused on ozone and mercury, with updates on recent activities of the Four Corners Air Quality Task Force (4CAQTF), air quality on tribal lands, and air quality jurisdictions in the Four Corners area. All presentations will be available on MSI's website www.mountainstudies.org after Labor Day.

The forum wrapped up with a panel discussion of the following question: "Given recent recorded ozone levels and the potential for the ozone standard to be lowered below the current 75 ppb, what challenges and opportunities should organizations, constituencies and citizens be focused on?" Panel members Jeremy Nichols, Wild Earth Guardians; Wally White, La Plata County Commissioner; Dana Wood, BP; Doug Blewitt, consultant; James Temte, Southern Ute Indian Tribe; and George San Miguel, Mesa Verde; were asked to spend five minutes answering, then engaging in audience Q/A. The panel was moderated by Stephanie Huss, president of the League of Women Voters of La Plata County.

Dana Wood mentioned the 4CAQTF modeling, which projected results from implementation of certain mitigation strategies on nitrogen oxide (NOx) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) emissions up to 2018, showing very little reduction on a base of approximately 50 ppb of emissions from sources outside our area or control, such as wildfire. Doug Blewitt discussed the greater than expected presence of ozone at high altitudes, indicating the need for more study of sources in high terrain.

Jeremy Nichols advocated for stopping the finger pointing and getting on with solving the problems with the data we have now, despite the desire for more. Models are all we have and they keep getting better and better. George San Miguel indicated that for Mesa Verde the Clean Air Act is just one of many federal mandates they must follow and they would benefit from access to a set of best practices. Their charge is to determine the dose impacting the ecology and its cumulative effects. James Temte sees our issues as coordination of activities, emissions reduction, avoidance of ozone non-attainment, mercury deposition and visibility.

The panelists all agreed that an EPA liaison based in the Four Corners area, who communicated with all groups and jurisdictions and coordinated a holistic approach to Four Corners issues would be a plus. Panelists also agreed that long-term regional air quality planning should replace the case by case treatment each newly proposed project gets from the EPA now, suggesting that perhaps this could be part of the EPA liaison's function. All agreed that the decision to lower the current ozone level from 75 ppb should be based only on health effects, acknowledging that the EPA has a prescriptive process per Clean Air Act and that process should be followed. A couple of panelists felt that the economic effects of a lower limit should at least be acknowledged.

Panelists felt that citizens should hold their public officials accountable for following through, particularly on mitigations suggestions in the 4CAQTF Report from 2007.

-Marilyn Brown

8-27-09