

## Biting the bullet: It's time to pay for clean air

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Increasingly, there are two seasons along the Wasatch Front. The hazy days of winter, when inversion layers trap fine-particle pollution in the valleys and make our air so thick you can see it and feel it. And the lazy days of summer, when we're chased indoors by an invisible but unhealthy blanket of ozone, a mix of auto exhaust and noxious fumes baked under a blazing sun.

This year, the inversion layers came often and stayed late, while the ozone season arrived early. The Utah Division of Air Quality issued its first ozone alert last week. In other words, we've jumped out of the smoke and into the chemical stew.

Enough is enough. It has to stop. Public advocacy groups such as Utah Physicians for a Healthy Environment and Utah Moms for Clean Air, demand it. The federal Environmental Protection Agency demands it. And, most importantly, our health demands it.

It's tough to blame ozone and fine-particle pollution problems on traditional industries, which are already cleaning up their acts. Experts agree that the cause is as close as the car in your driveway and the trucks on the highway. And the solution is as close as Capitol Hill.

The state Legislature, which too often considers "environment" a dirty word and treats the Utah Department of Environmental Quality like an ugly stepchild, will be asked to act next year. We hope it finds the courage.

Because our lawmakers refuse to adequately fund the DEQ, the agency has formed a task force of stakeholders to recommend how to raise \$3 million per year for air quality improvement planning and implementation.

The money is needed for monitoring, scientific studies, and the drafting of a plan to eventually bring the state into compliance with new EPA regulations for fine-particle pollution and ozone. Results from 23 monitoring stations already indicate that the state exceeds these regulations along the Wasatch Front, and similar results are expected when new ozone standards are issued next year.

If the state fails to fall into line in time, it could forfeit federal transportation funding.

Because the majority of the pollutants flow from tailpipes, the task force will likely recommend higher fuel taxes, increased vehicle registration fees, an emissions tax based on vehicle age, or a combination of the three, all aimed at changing our polluting ways.

The taxes and fees will not be popular. But the Legislature, and the rest of us, will have to bite the bullet. Our health, our longevity, depend on it.

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