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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 1 Marks Start of Ozone Season MORPC Informs Public of Ground-Level Ozone Hazards

(Columbus – March 31, 2015) The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) reminds the local media and residents that Wednesday, April 1 marks the start of Air Quality Alert season as Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) begins collecting ozone data. From April through October, Ohio EPA monitors ozone pollution because it peaks in the warmer summer months, which can create unhealthy levels of air pollution triggering Air Quality Alerts.

MORPC is part of a network of agencies across the country that issues daily air quality forecasts and notifies the public when ozone and particle pollution levels are considered to be unhealthy for sensitive groups of people. According to Ohio EPA, there are 49 ozone monitors operating statewide that contribute data to Ohio EPA's ambient air monitoring network. Seven of those are in the central Ohio area.

There are two main air pollutants in central Ohio that are a threat to public health: ozone and particle pollution. Ground-level ozone is a colorless, odorless gas produced when emissions from vehicles, lawn equipment and industry combine in the presence of sunlight. Particle pollution is a mixture of solids and liquid droplets that vary in size. Unlike ozone pollution, particle pollution does not need sunlight to form and can reach unhealthy levels anytime during the year. Sources include motor vehicle exhaust, construction activity, power plants, industrial facilities and residential fireplaces. MORPC issues daily forecasts for both of these pollutants and issues an Air Quality Alert the day before the levels are predicted to be Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups.

Earlier this month, MORPC submitted a favorable position to U.S. EPA's proposal to strengthen the primary ozone standard from 75 to a minimum level of 70 parts per billion. This minimal level will provide increased public health protection, especially for children, seniors, outdoor workers and those with asthma.

MORPC uses the national Air Quality Index (AQI) scale to inform the public about daily ozone and particle pollution levels in central Ohio. The AQI scale runs from 0 to 300 – the higher the AQI value, the greater the health concern. When levels reach above 100, air quality is considered to be Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups, which includes people with respiratory and heart disease, children and older adults. MORPC issues an Air Quality Alert to the public when pollution levels reach 101 or higher.

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People with asthma are more likely to suffer an increase in the number and severity of symptoms during an Air Quality Alert. To decrease the potential for health implications, sensitive groups are urged to limit prolonged outdoor exertion. Everyone can reduce their exposure to air pollution by saving strenuous outdoor activities for the evening or morning, when pollution levels are generally lower. Residents can also take steps to reduce emissions contributing to ozone by carpooling, taking the bus, refueling after dark and avoiding the use of gas powered lawn equipment on alert days. The Ohio Air Quality Development Authority offers financing programs to assist large and small Ohio businesses in the purchase, construction and installation of new facilities and equipment that improve energy efficiency and conservation and help abate air pollution. More information is available at www.ohioairquality.org.

Central Ohioans can sign-up online to receive Air Quality Alert notifications delivered straight to their inbox by visiting <http://airquality.morpc.org> and clicking on the EnviroFlash logo to start receiving these free notifications. They can also call MORPC's toll-free air quality hotline at 1-888-666-1009 to listen to the latest forecast to help plan your days accordingly to reduce your exposure to air pollution.

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The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) is a voluntary association of local governments and regional organizations which envisions and embraces innovative directions in economic prosperity, energy, the environment, housing, land use, and transportation. Our transformative programming, services and innovative public policy are designed to promote and support the vitality and growth in the region.