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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 1 Marked Start of Ozone Season and New Stronger Standard in Effect

(Columbus – April 12, 2016) The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) reminds the local media and residents that Friday, April 1 marked 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. 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 and its sources include motor vehicle exhaust, power plants, and industrial facilities. 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.

Last fall, U.S. EPA strengthened the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for ground-level ozone to 70 parts per billion (ppb) from 75 ppb, based on scientific evidence of effects that ground-level ozone pollution has on public health. Because the evidence points to pollution being harmful at this lower level to sensitive groups of people such as children, the elderly, and those with respiratory disease, the region may experience an increase in Air Quality Alerts this year.

"The good news is that we ended the 2015 ozone season with better air quality compared to 2013 and 2014 despite warmer temperatures during the 2015 season," states Evelyn Ebert, MORPC Air Quality Program Supervisor. "This points to decreased emission levels in the region. Recent data shows that Central Ohio is close to meeting the tighter ozone standard."

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.

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Working to Build a Better Region

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MORPC issues an Air Quality Alert to the public when pollution levels reach 101 or higher.

People with asthma are more likely to suffer an increase in the number and severity of symptoms during an Air Quality Alert. Outdoor workers should also be aware of respiratory or cardiovascular effects from unhealthy air including coughing, shortness of breath and chest tightness. 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 Air Quality Alert days. MORPC RideSolutions can work with Central Ohioans to find ways to get to work that do not require driving alone in a car.

Central Ohioans can sign-up online to receive Air Quality Alert notifications delivered straight to their inbox by visiting <http://airquality.morpc.org>. 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. MORPC's toll-free Air Quality hotline has English and Spanish language options to best serve the Central Ohio community.

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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.