Topic of the Month: Cleaner Air for a Growing Region

Ozone season has once again reared its head in North Texas, bringing hazy skies and a reminder that summer doesn't just bring triple-digit temperatures. It also brings some of our year's worst air quality.

Our ongoing **Topic of the Month** series is devoted to air quality this month and the many ways NCTCOG and its partners are working to create a cleaner, healthier future for North Texas. From expanding air quality monitoring and planning for long-term improvements to supporting alternative fuels and innovative transportation technologies, these efforts are helping improve the air we all breathe while preparing the region for continued growth.

Monitoring Progress

The Dallas-Fort Worth region continues working toward meeting the federal ozone standards, with attainment of the current standards to be determined using air quality data collected from 2024 through 2026. While ozone remains the region's primary air quality challenge, NCTCOG also monitors other pollutants, including fine particulate matter (PM2.5), to help ensure healthy air for residents across North Texas.

To strengthen the region's monitoring network, NCTCOG installed five new ozone monitors in and around Hood County and six PM2.5 monitors in Dallas, Ellis and Tarrant counties during 2025. These monitors provide valuable information about how traffic, construction activity and weather conditions affect air quality. The expanded network helps identify trends, improve forecasting and support more effective strategies to reduce pollution.

Cleaner Outdoor Air Means Healthier Indoor Air for North Texans

Most people think of air pollution as something that happens outdoors - traffic congestion, industrial emissions or summertime smog. However, because Americans spend nearly 90% of their time indoors, air inside homes, schools and workplaces has a major impact on public health.

What many residents may not realize is that indoor and outdoor air quality are closely connected. Outdoor pollutants such as ozone and fine particulate matter can enter buildings through doors, windows, ventilation systems and small openings in the building. Inside, these pollutants combine with indoor sources such as cooking, cleaning products and building materials.

This connection highlights the importance of achieving and maintaining attainment of federal air quality standards. Under the Clean Air Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency establishes National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to protect public

health from harmful pollutants. When a region reaches "attainment," it means monitored pollutant concentrations meet these health-based standards.

For North Texas, attainment carries significant benefits. Lower levels of ozone and $PM_{2.5}$ are associated with fewer asthma attacks, respiratory illnesses or emergency room visits. Cleaner outdoor air also means cleaner air entering homes, schools, and businesses, reducing overall exposure to harmful pollutants.

The benefits extend beyond health. Areas that meet federal air quality standards often experience economic advantages, including reduced healthcare costs, improved workforce productivity and fewer regulatory requirements affecting businesses and local governments. Cleaner air can also improve quality of life by making outdoor activities safer and more enjoyable for residents.

While attainment is an important milestone, maintaining good indoor air quality remains essential. Proper ventilation, effective filtration, regular HVAC maintenance, and reducing indoor pollution sources can further improve the air people breathe every day.

Planning for Cleaner Air

NCTCOG is leading development of the Dallas-Fort Worth Air Quality Improvement Plan (AQIP) through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Looking ahead to 2050, the plan will identify practical, long-term strategies to improve regional air quality while accommodating continued population growth and increased travel demand. The plan will also help address the region's ozone challenges through collaboration with local governments, transportation agencies and community partners.

Expanding Cleaner Transportation

Transportation plays an important role in improving regional air quality. As more residents and businesses adopt alternative fuel vehicle technologies, North Texas is seeing steady growth in both electric vehicles (EVs) and the infrastructure needed to support them.

More than 46,000 new electric vehicles were registered in the region during 2025, bringing the regional total to more than 168,000 EVs, with passenger vehicles accounting for approximately 93% of registrations.

To support this growing number of EVs, the region now has more than 3,300 public Level 2 and DC fast charging connectors. NCTCOG is also working with partners to deploy more than 250 additional charging ports at public-sector locations. Additionally, NCTCOG recommended more than 40 charging locations to the Texas Department of Transportation to be funded with National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Program funding. More details on

these projects to fill gaps in the regional charging network and make EV ownership more convenient for drivers can be found at http://publicinput.com/nctcogevcharging.

Beyond infrastructure, NCTCOG supports workforce development and community readiness through initiatives that help train future EV charging technicians, recognize municipalities for EV readiness, and prepare communities for the continued growth of electric transportation.

Supporting Cleaner Fleets

Commercial, public and private fleets continue to make significant contributions to regional air quality improvements by transitioning to alternative fuels and improving vehicle efficiency.

According to preliminary results from the 2025 Dallas-Fort Worth Clean Cities Annual Survey, participating fleets displaced nearly 34 million gasoline gallon equivalents through alternative fuels and fuel-saving technologies. Those efforts also reduced approximately 124,000 lbs of ozone-forming nitrogen oxide emissions and prevented more than 307,000 tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO_2e) emissions. .

Funding opportunities are helping accelerate the transition to cleaner commercial and public fleets. Through the North Texas Zero Emission Vehicles Call for Projects, NCTCOG is offering $55.4 million in rebates to help public and private fleets replace older, higher-emitting vocational vehicles with new zero-emission models.

Eligible vehicles include box trucks, transit buses, refuse haulers, utility trucks, dump trucks, fire trucks, street sweepers and other vocational vehicles. Replacement vehicles must be battery-electric or hydrogen fuel cell electric, with older internal combustion vehicles permanently removed from service. To help applicants navigate the process, NCTCOG offers weekly virtual office hours, application development assistance and resources to connect fleets with manufacturers offering eligible zero-emission vehicles.

Nearly 100 public and private organizations have also adopted NCTCOG's Clean Fleet Policy, demonstrating their commitment to reducing emissions while improving fleet efficiency.

Innovation for the Future

NCTCOG continues to support innovative transportation solutions that improve mobility while reducing emissions. One example is the City of Arlington's Multimodal Delivery Project, which demonstrated how electric aerial and ground robots can safely deliver food to mobility-challenged residents. The project highlights how emerging technologies can improve quality of life while supporting cleaner transportation options.

NCTCOG is also helping communities prepare for future energy needs by providing technical assistance on energy efficiency, renewable energy planning and resilient infrastructure. As transportation becomes increasingly electrified, these efforts will help ensure the region is ready to meet growing energy demands while supporting cleaner air.

How You Can Help Improve Air Quality

Improving air quality is a shared responsibility, and small changes can make a meaningful difference. Residents can help by:

- **Choosing public transportation.** North Texas offers a variety of transit options through Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), Denton County Transportation Authority (DCTA) and Trinity Metro, including buses, rail service and on-demand rideshare options.
- **Driving smarter.** Carpooling, combining errands into a single trip and reducing unnecessary driving can help lower vehicle emissions and reduce traffic congestion.
- **Getting involved.** NCTCOG's **Air North Texas** public awareness campaign provides tips, resources and practical ways for residents, businesses and local governments to help improve the region's air quality. Visit **AirNorthTexas.org** to learn more and discover simple actions you can take to make a difference.

Improving air quality is a long-term effort that requires collaboration across the region and participation from everyone who calls North Texas home. Through expanded monitoring, strategic planning, cleaner transportation technologies, public education and strong partnerships, NCTCOG is helping build a healthier, more sustainable future for current and future generations.