Air quality in the pits once again

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The Baton Rouge area violated federal air quality standards for the 12th time this year as ozone Friday again reached unhealthy levels.

A reading of 144 parts per billion was recorded in Port Allen, 137 ppb in Baker and 124 ppb at LSU, according to Manop Vanichchagorn of the Department of Environmental Quality.

The levels were reached in mid-afternoon, but were all back into the moderate range by late afternoon, he said. There also were elevated levels in New Roads and Carville, but they did not violate federal standards.

The fact that there was little air movement contributed to the problem, Vanichchagorn said.

Vehicles, power plants and industries are among the producers of the pollutants that cause ozone formation.

High levels of ozone can cause sinus problems, shortness of breath and other respiratory problems, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Problems can show up in some individuals even before federal air quality standards are violated.

Last month DEQ issued orders to 64 area industries instructing them to come up with plans for reducing their nitrogen oxide and hydrocarbon emissions in order to lessen the ozone problem.

The orders were sent to all industries in the seven-parish area that emit more than 100 tons of hydrocarbons or
nitrogen oxides each year.

Federal officials also have called upon the state to come up with a plan to reduce ozone levels in the area.

During four straight days in July, the Baton Rouge area violated federal air quality standards for ozone, and on July 31, an ozone level in the very unhealthy range was recorded.

Several doctors interviewed by the Morning Advocate indicated they saw an increased number of respiratory complaints during the high ozone period in July.

In addition to industry and power plants, vehicles, paint shops and cleaners will be among the sources of air pollutants that will be more stringently controlled in order to reduce the ozone problem, according to DEQ.

Ozone is formed when hydrocarbons mix with nitrogen oxide and undergo a reaction caused by sunlight.