Ozone hits unhealthy level again

By BOB ANDERSON
Environmental editor

Ozone levels in Baton Rouge violated federal air pollution standards for the 14th time Wednesday, and air quality officials are predicting another violation Thursday.

That is the most violations the Baton Rouge area has had since 1981 when there were 17 days on which the standards were exceeded, records show.

Ozone levels rose over the federal standard at LSU between 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. reaching .13 parts per million and continued upward to .16 ppm later in the day, according to officials with the Department of Environmental Quality.

The levels also exceeded federal standards at the State Capitol and were high at the other area monitoring sites — Baker, Port Allen and Carville, according to Gus Von Bodungen, head of DEQ's air quality division.

Computer models indicate another violation is "very likely" Thursday, but air will probably clear up Friday, Von Bodungen said.

Persons with respiratory problems are advised to restrict outdoor activities during such periods.

High levels of ozone are most likely to cause respiratory complaints in those with pre-existing conditions and in children and the elderly, particularly when those persons are involved in outdoor exercise.

Several local physicians interviewed by the Morning Advocate say they see increased respiratory complaints during and in the days following periods of high ozone pollution.

The federal standard for ozone is .12 ppm, but experts say physical effects can be noticed at even lower levels, especially when there is prolonged exposure associated with exercise.

Among the symptoms associated with high ozone exposure are wheezing, sinus problems, sore throats, eye irritation, headaches and congestion, environmental officials say.

It also has been associated with yield losses in farm production, damage to trees and ill effects on various man-made surfaces, including paint, rubber and textiles.

Ozone is formed when hydrocarbons and nitrogen oxides combine and are acted upon by sunlight. Vehicles and industries are among the big producers of those pollutants.

Ozone levels tend to be worse in cities during warm, sunny periods when there is also little air movement.