Unhealthful air recorded again

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Baton Rouge air pollution reached the unhealthful level again Thursday afternoon, if a reading turns out to have been accurate.

It was the third time this year that air quality as measured by the Pollution Standards Index exceeded 100 on the scale and was considered unhealthful. Thursday afternoon’s reading was 106.

The measurement is based on ozone. Tom Coerver of the Department of Environmental Quality’s air quality division said the reading was very close to the mark and may not have been an actual excess measurement.

He said further examination and analysis of the reading will be done in the coming days.

“It may well not turn out to be a true (excess measurement). But any way you cut it, it was close,” Coerver said.

The combination of hot weather and still air was apparently the culprit causing the ozone measurement, Coerver said.

The reading was taken between 1 and 2 p.m. at LSU. A monitoring station is also located at the State Capitol, although levels were not reported to be in excess by the state reporting system, Coerver said.

Another violation this early in the year does not bode well for the Baton Rouge area getting off a list of areas not in compliance with federal air standards.

A city that exceeds federal air

SEE OZONE, 2B
standards more than once in a year cannot get off the non-compliance list.

Federal law provides for stiff penalties for cities that continue to violate the standards this year. This summer, Congress will consider extending the deadline for getting into compliance.

Ozone is formed when sunlight reacts with hydrocarbon emissions. Ozone is usually a problem during summer months.

“To it’s not surprising. We haven’t solved the problem yet,” said DEQ Secretary Paul Templet, when asked about the reading Thursday evening.

“The problem has been long-term and the solution is going to be long-term, too,” he said.

Creation of ozone is “the result of a complex reaction,” Templet said.

Nitrogen oxides are a key element in the chemical mix that can create ozone.

Too much of one form or not enough of another can result in conditions that cause ozone, Templet said.

“In some areas they have found that when auto emissions are not high enough, they get” an excess measurement, he said.

High ozone levels have been linked to respiratory problems and high levels are most likely to cause difficulty for those who suffer from asthma, emphysema and other lung disorders. Elderly people and children are more susceptible to illness related to high ozone levels than healthy adults.

Experts say adverse effects can be caused by readings of less than 100.

State officials say 75 percent of the hydrocarbon emissions in the Baton Rouge area are industrial and 25 percent come from auto exhausts, though the Louisiana Chemical Association has disagreed with that ratio.