Lexile # 980

**Trouble In The Air In Wyoming**

**CHEYENNE, Wyoming** (Achieve3000, May 12, 2011). Wyoming is famous for its crisp mountain air.It's known for awe-inspiring views and breathtaking natural landscapes. But lately, clouds of smog from Wyoming's natural gas drilling sites have hidden some of the state's majestic scenery. At times, pollution from gas fields has reached dangerously high levels. When this occurs, state officials urge residents to stay indoors. Now, officials in the gas industry are working to reduce harmful [emissions](http://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=15336&step=11&c=63&asn=1).

The Upper Green River Basin region of Wyoming has been particularly affected by rising air pollution levels.This is a natural gas-rich part of the state. The drilling of new gas wells, along with routine upkeep and use of gas-field equipment, caused ozone levels to rise. The levels reached a record high in 2010.They were higher even than those reported in some of the biggest cities in the U.S. Data from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) show ozone levels reached as high as 124 parts per billion in the basin. This figure is two-thirds higher than the EPA's [maximum](http://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=15336&step=11&c=63&asn=1) healthy limit of 75 parts per billion.

So how exactly does this ozone form? During the winter, gas industry emissions combine with snow on the ground, bright sunshine, and [temperature inversions](http://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=15336&step=11&c=63&asn=1), in which cool air near the ground is trapped by a layer of warmer air. As the day goes on, pollution builds up. By midafternoon, it becomes visible above the horizon. It can be seen as a thin layer of brown smudge, or smog. It's not the kind of smog that clouds and chokes the air at ground level. But even so, people have noticed that details of nearby mountains don't appear as razor-sharp as they once did.

Residents near the gas fields have reported numerous health problems related to the high ozone levels. Issues reported include watery eyes and shortness of breath, and bloody noses. On some days, the air quality has been so bad that state officials caution certain people to avoid extended activity outdoors. The elderly, children, and people with respiratory conditions face the greatest risk.

In a strange way, the smog in the Upper Green River Basin represents a haze of [prosperity](http://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=15336&step=11&c=63&asn=1" \o "Show dictionary definition):The profitable natural gas industry has been very good for Wyoming's economy. Hundreds of wells have been drilled in the region over the past decade. This has made it one of the top gas-producing areas in the U.S. At a time when many other states are running up monumental debts, Wyoming lawmakers are projecting a state budget [surplus](http://portal.achieve3000.com/kb/lesson/?lid=15336&step=11&c=63&asn=1) of more than $1 billion by the end of 2011. Wyoming also enjoys one of the nation's lowest unemployment rates. And gas drilling in the region is going strong.