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November starts with Dangerous Levels of Air Pollution

Outdoor levels of sulfur dioxide in Muscatine reached dangerous levels on four out of the first six days in November. Based on standards developed by the US Environmental Protection Agency these high levels of sulfur dioxide pose a health risk for all adults and children and are particularly hazardous for sensitive groups, including children, the elderly, and those with chronic heart and lung conditions.

The US Environmental Protection Agency's National Ambient Air Quality Standard for sulfur dioxide is set at 75 parts per billion (ppb) of a unit of air, averaged over a one-hour period. On two of the four days in Muscatine the levels were nearly 200 ppb, and on the worst day they were almost 250 ppb. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources has ambient air quality monitors in the city, and preliminary tests have confirmed the accuracy of the elevated sulfur dioxide readings.

"These are levels that I might see from the US Embassy's monitor in Beijing, China," said Leland Searles, Air Quality Program Director for the Iowa Environmental Council. Pollution in Beijing became an international issue in 2008 before the Summer Olympic Games. "That this happened for four out of six consecutive days anywhere in Iowa is very disturbing."

Health research has shown that concentrations of the pollutant over the EPA standard are tied to higher emergency room and clinic visits, premature death, and lost school and work days.

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About the Iowa Environmental Council

The Iowa Environmental Council actively works in public policy to provide a safe, healthy environment for all Iowans. The Council focuses on public education and coalition building to give Iowans a voice on issues that affect their quality of life and to protect Iowa's natural resources for current and future generations. For more information contact the Iowa Environmental Council or visit www.iaenvironment.org.