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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AIR QUALITY ALERT ISSUED FOR WESTCHESTER COUNTY TODAY

The Westchester County Department of Health today announced that the United States Department of Environmental Conservation has issued an air quality advisory for today, Wednesday, May 12, 2004 for the Metropolitan New York City region, which includes New York City, Rockland and Westchester. The air quality alert is due to high levels of particulate matter or PM_{2.5}.

The Westchester County Department of Health recommends that when outdoor levels of PM_{2.5} are elevated, going indoors may reduce your exposure, although some outdoor particles will come indoors. Some ways to reduce exposure are to limit indoor and outdoor activities that produce fine particles (for example, burning candles indoors or open burning outdoors) and avoid strenuous activity when fine particle levels are high. Contact your healthcare provider for specific recommendations if you are at particular risk.

Particulate matter or PM_{2.5} particles are able to travel deeply into the respiratory tract, reaching the lungs. Exposure to such fine particles can cause short-term health effects such as eye, nose, throat and lung irritation, coughing, sneezing, runny nose and shortness of breath. Exposure to such fine particles can also affect lung function and aggravate existing medical conditions such as asthma and heart disease. People with breathing and heart problems, children and the elderly may be particularly sensitive to PM_{2.5}. People without previous respiratory illnesses may not be negatively affected by the particulates in the air.

Outdoor air levels of PM_{2.5} increase during periods of stagnant air (very little wind and air mixing), when the particles are not carried away by wind, or when winds bring polluted air into the state from sources outside the area. In general, as the levels of PM_{2.5} in outdoor air increase, the air appears hazy and visibility is reduced. These conditions are similar in appearance to high humidity or fog.

Sources of PM_{2.5} the exhausts of cars, trucks, buses and off-road vehicles (e.g., construction equipment, snowmobiles, locomotives). In New York State, some of the fine particles measured in the air are carried by wind from out-of-state sources. Because these fine particles can be carried long distances from their source, events such as wildfires or volcanic eruptions can raise fine particle concentrations hundreds of miles from the event. PM_{2.5} is also produced by common indoor activities. Some indoor sources of fine particles are tobacco smoke, cooking (e.g., frying, sautéing, and broiling), burning candles or oil lamps, and operating fireplaces and fuel-burning space heaters (e.g., kerosene heaters).

For more information on PM_{2.5}, contact the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000 or visit www.westchestergov.com/health.

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