

# HOW SMOG IS DESTROYING DENVER'S ROCKY MOUNTAIN VIEWS

The Denver metro area is the gateway to the Rocky Mountains. Colorado is known across the world for its incredible opportunities to hike, climb, bike, fish, ski, snowboard; you name it – if its outdoors, Colorado is a great place for it. Denver lies just an hour east of the beautiful Rocky Mountains, but it is also known for its sometimes poor air quality. Smog is one of the great dichotomies of living in the Denver region.



Denver area homes and a view of Rocky Mountains' Longs Peak (14,259 feet)

Whereas smog is decreasing across most major cities, Denver is one of the few cities to see increases in smog and lower overall air quality. Denver has been consistently exceeding the seventy-five parts per million standards since 2010.

The Denver area fell out of compliance in 1997 with EPA's eighty-four parts per billion standard. It fell out of compliance again in 2008 when the Bush administration lowered the limit to seventy-five parts per billion. That was reaffirmed with the Obama administration in 2011. There are talks for another reduction for major cities, and Denver is yet again struggling to develop policies and measures to help meet compliance standards.

Quoted in a 2010 Denver Post news article, Callie Videtich, Regional Director of EPA air programs, suggested residents help reduce emissions and help air quality by riding the bus and bicycling instead of driving, weed-whacking and lawn mowing after sunset, and maybe ditching the leaf-blowers and switching to power mowers.



An industrial park smoke stack in Denver, Colorado

With all due respect to Ms. Videtich, I find none of these measures substantial enough to help meet the new EPA guidelines and make the region more sustainable. In a previous blog, I noted that Denver's light-rail system is not nearly substantial enough (yet) to induce drivers to take to the rails. The bus system isn't either. Nor do I believe that mowing later at night is going to lead to a substantial change in air quality.

In the Denver region, 1/3 of air pollution comes from vehicles and gas vapors, about 25 to 40% from power plants, and about 1/4 is made up of the household items Ms. Videtich mentioned. The region needs real policies, a real transportation system, and a real commitment by policy-makers and urban planners to enhancing air quality. Mowing at night just isn't going to cut it.

Unfortunately, a new industry with real political and economic clout is just hitting its strides: the oil and gas industry across the Denver region. It is at least partly to blame for the increasing smog. There have been about 3,200 new wells drilled in the state per year since 2007. In 2014, there are now more than 51,000 wells statewide.

It is certainly no Los Angeles, but Denver – even with all its progressive environmentalism and sustainable development – still struggles to keep air quality at an acceptable level.

Source: <http://www.globalsiteplans.com/environmental-design/infrastructure/how-smog-is-destroying-denvers-rocky-mountain-views/>