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Governor's Pollution Prevention Award, 1999 Recipient

The Regional Ozone Coalition, Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments

The Governor's Awards for Outstanding Achievement in Pollution Prevention have been presented annually since 1986. The Regional Ozone Coalition, an Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI) organization, was one of nine recipients to receive the award in 1999. These awards recognize outstanding commitments to improve Ohio's environment through pollution prevention. Evaluation criteria for the awards include: the reduction of waste at the source, recycling or recovery of materials, cost-effectiveness, ability of the program to serve as a model for others, and effectiveness in promoting pollution prevention as the preferred long-term approach for environmental management.

The Regional Ozone Coalition

The policies and programs of OKI are created and maintained to foster public/private partnerships from which effective solutions to regional transportation, environmental and development challenges can be secured. OKI provides the opportunity for 183 member governments, civic organizations, and the business community within its eight-county, three-state region to have an active role in the development of regional transportation plans. OKI also provides an accessible forum where local issues of regional significance are discussed and collaborative solutions are developed. OKI is the parent organization of the Regional Ozone Coalition (ROC).

The ROC is a voluntary association of local governments, organizations and business committed to reducing smog in Boone, Butler, Campbell, Clermont, Hamilton, Kenton, and Warren counties. OKI is comprised of 40 full-time employees. Three are assigned to staff the ROC.

The Regional Ozone Coalition, Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments, is recognized for:



- implementing a gas cap replacement program. Through this program, motorists had the opportunity to voluntarily have their vehicle's gas cap tested and replaced, if necessary, for free;
- targeting motorists who owned vehicles with 1971-1973 model years with a direct mailing, since those vehicles are not required to undergo Ohio's vehicle emissions testing program;
- distributing approximately 23,000 gas caps to vehicle owners in the Cincinnati metropolitan area in 1998;
- eliminating an estimated 3.5 tons of hydrocarbon emissions daily, and almost 1,300 tons annually; and
- helping to demonstrate, in conjunction with the region's regulatory requirements and voluntary efforts, that the Cincinnati area attained the ozone standard and is maintaining a healthy level of air quality.

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The seven counties of southwestern Ohio and northern Kentucky that comprise the Greater Cincinnati urban airshed are classified as a moderate non-attainment area for ozone under the one-hour ozone standard. The threat of being bumped up to a "serious" non-attainment area created an immediate need for public education and awareness. In July 1994, the Regional Ozone Coalition was formed in response. The coalition developed a public information campaign helping residents and businesses understand the consequences of high ozone levels and encouraged them to voluntarily limit actions that contribute to the ozone problem. One of the most successful voluntary programs of the 1998 smog season was the gas cap replacement program.

The Gas Cap Replacement Program

Planning of this public service pollution prevention project began in April 1997. Between April and July 1997, research concerning the environmental benefits, feasibility, costs and potential private sponsorship was conducted. In October 1997, BP Oil (now BP Amoco), the ROC and several other potential sponsors agreed to "do their share for cleaner air" by sponsoring the replacement of 30,000 leaking gas caps.

Significant effort, planning and coordination was required throughout the duration of the project by the ROC to schedule test days, assign staff and volunteers, and to assure an adequate supply of replacement caps and testing equipment was available. The ROC also developed the marketing materials needed for

the campaign and coordinated the media coverage. On March 16, 1998, the program was commenced at a ceremony held at a BP Procure Center in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The key to the success of the effort was making the program as convenient as possible. The program offered four ways for vehicle owners to participate:

- **BP Procure Testing:** All vehicles in the greater Cincinnati area were given the opportunity to have their gas caps checked for free at any one of the 16 BP Procure Centers in the area. Vehicle owners with leaking caps were given a voucher redeemable for a free replacement cap at participating NAPA Auto Parts stores in the area and all participants received coupons. BP Procure estimates that they tested over 27,000 caps during the program.
- **E-Check:** E-Check is Ohio's vehicle inspection and maintenance program. Five thousand vouchers, redeemable for a free replacement gas cap, were distributed among the E-check stations. These vouchers were given to the vehicle owners whose caps were determined to be leaking by E-Check.
- **On-Site Portable Testing:** This was the most challenging aspect of the program because of the amount of commitment it required from volunteers. The ROC offered companies the opportunity to sponsor a "Gas Cap Replacement Day" at their place of business. Volunteers from the ROC and other sponsors used portable testers to test

their employees' cars. Over 100 businesses participated, bringing the number of caps that were tested in this component of the program to well over 8,000.

- **Direct Mail-out:** Although the main focus of the Cincinnati Gas Cap Replacement Program was to test caps and replace only leaking ones, the ROC decided it was important to reach 1971-1973 model year vehicles which are exempt from E-Check and have the highest percentage of leaking caps.

The ROC obtained a list of '71-'73 vehicle owners from the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles. These vehicle owners were mailed a replacement cap along with coupons and a letter explaining the program. In Northern Kentucky, more than 12,000 caps were sent out. In Southwestern Ohio, more than 6,000 were distributed. The Ohio EPA Division of Air Pollution Control provided financial support for the Ohio mailout costs. BP incurred the costs of the mail-out to Northern Kentucky vehicle owners.

Unique Features of the Project

This fully sponsored project sought to improve air quality by replacing leaking gas caps. A leaking cap allows gasoline vapors to escape from the fuel system of vehicles. During the organizing phase of this effort the Ohio E-Check vehicle testing program was suspended. With that vehicle testing program suspended, the entire region did not benefit from emission reductions during 1997 and would not benefit from testing during the 1998 smog season if the program failed to

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resume testing. Once the E-Check program restarted in January 1998, ROC was able to direct this pollution reduction effort towards vehicles that would not be tested at E-Check such as the older cars. ROC did not limit its testing to just vehicles registered in the four county area where E-Check testing was mandated. ROC tested and replaced leaking caps for any vehicle owner that wanted to participate. Hence, its program provided pollution reductions to a significant number of vehicles that were operating in the metropolitan area and otherwise would not have been tested.

The technology was simple, requiring only a team of volunteers, a note pad, the portable tester, a reference chart for caps and vehicles, and a supply of replacement caps. It should be noted that this program was well received by the public.

This pollution prevention project was unique in a number of ways. This was a true public service program. ROC's project also involved on-site testing with an immediate replacement of a leaking gas cap with a free gas cap. This made the program efficient and cost effective for participants and sponsors.

In order to increase opportunity for high participation, the ROC and sponsors made the gas cap replacement program as convenient and easy as possible. Due to the designs of the equipment and the simplicity of the program, it is easily transferable to any location. In addition, this program does not require any major investment. The equipment is inexpensive, portable by design and easy to operate. The largest expense is the cost of the replacement gas cap.

Management Commitment

Due to the uniqueness of this pollution prevention project, management commitment is identified in numerous ways. First, there was the commitment of the management within the administration of the city of Cincinnati to allow staff to pursue the necessary research and potential sponsorship of this project. Secondly, there was complete dedication of the OKI management to support this project and commit resources and staff to ensure its success. There was also significant commitment from all the sponsors. Finally, ROC enjoyed much support from the management of participating companies. The management who sponsored test days at their facilities were responsible for stressing the importance of the program and opportunity and volunteered their own time to assist with the on-site testing. In many cases, these testing efforts lasted for days, were conducted in the rain and started, in some instances, very early in the morning.

Marketing

Because of the time constraints on the program (May through September 1998), marketing was an important aspect of the program. It was essential to inform the general public about the program, as well as businesses in the area. In order to reach both of these audiences, a variety of marketing strategies were used. It was also important that the media had interest in the program for further coverage.

In order to reach the general public, a marketing campaign was formed using the slogan "Put A Cap On Smog!" This slogan was a common

theme throughout all promotions, including more than 125,000 color brochures that were produced and distributed. Thirty second TV spots were created along with 60 second radio spots which ran throughout the summer months. The ROC also produced billboards that were strategically located throughout the four southwestern Ohio counties.

The ROC was assisted by the efforts of several of its members and other program sponsors. The local gas and electric company distributed information about the program to 700,000 residents in the area through a bill insert. The donated value is estimated at \$4,000. The local telephone company also delivered information about the program in its billings to residents in the seven county area. A major grocery company included an ad for the program in its weekly coupon booklet. A local TV station sponsored a promotional program that encouraged vehicle owners to have their caps checked at BP Procure and register to win tickets to the Riverbend production of *Riverdance*. The promotion included TV advertising and point of purchase displays at each of the 16 BP Procure locations. The donated value is estimated at \$25,000.

It was important to create interest on behalf of businesses willing to sponsor a "Gas Cap Replacement Day." The ROC began by faxing an informational flyer in early May 1998 to more than 800 businesses in the area which explained the program and gave the businesses a chance to call or fax for more information or set up a testing day. The Greater Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce and the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce

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further promoted the program through letters sent to businesses through mailing lists.

In order to reach the media, press kits were prepared and distributed at a kick-off event at the Central Avenue BP Procure. Speakers included the mayor of the city of Cincinnati, a Hamilton County commissioner, and a representative from BP Oil Company's senior management. All four local TV stations were present and ran stories about the program. Press kits were delivered to the radio and print stations that were not present at the kick-off event.

Environmental Benefits

Based on information provided by the Ohio EPA and the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles, it was estimated that in the southwestern Ohio area, 60,000 vehicles (model 1971-1997) had leaking gas caps. Additionally, the Kentucky Motor Vehicle Commission estimated that there was 12,000 vehicles with leaking gas caps in the northern Kentucky area. The ROC, based on sponsor participation, set a goal to replace 30,000 leaking gas caps in the area which would eliminate more than 2,000 tons of air pollutants each year.

The gas cap replacement program reduced evaporative emissions of air pollutants from mobile sources. This program was an effective way to reduce evaporative volatile organic compounds (VOC) losses from vehicles in Greater Cincinnati. In conjunction with regulatory requirements and voluntary efforts, the gas cap replacement program helped the tri-state demonstrate attainment of the ozone standard and maintain a healthy level of air quality.

Through this cooperative effort approximately 23,000 caps were distributed to vehicle owners. This eliminated an estimated 3.5 tons of hydrocarbon emissions daily, or almost 1,300 tons annually.

Other Benefits

The major benefit from a public health standpoint is the improvement in ambient air quality for the region. The National Ambient Air Quality Standard for ground-level ozone is a health-based standard. The emission losses that were reduced by this popular program helped the region achieve the long-sought-after goal of being in a position of demonstrating attainment of the one-hour ozone standard. Since the early 1970's the region had been in non-attainment for this pollutant, creating unhealthy air for the elderly, children and

others with respiratory problems. Being a non-attainment area also had adverse implications on the economic development opportunities in the region. More importantly, by reducing the emission of pollutants into the ambient air that contributed to ozone formation, the health and welfare of residents in the entire region were improved.

Vehicle owners receiving a replacement cap realized a number of economic benefits:

- Eliminated evaporative losses of fuel (up to \$30.00 per year);
- Received a free gas cap (cost varies, on average \$5.00);
- Received participatory coupons from sponsors redeemable for goods and services;
- Reduced time spent on replacing lost fuel; and
- May have prevented E-Check failure.

For more information

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The Office of Pollution Prevention was created to encourage multi-media pollution prevention activities in Ohio to reduce risk to public health, safety, welfare and the environment. Pollution prevention stresses source reduction and, as a second choice, environmentally sound recycling while avoiding cross media transfers. The Office develops information related to pollution prevention, increases awareness of pollution prevention opportunities, and can offer technical assistance to business, government, and the public.



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