



September 2005

Bust the Dust – Background Info

Have you ever been caught in a cloud of dust? Do you think that since you live in the desert, we should expect dust to be in the air?

Airborne dust is particulate matter (PM) pollution, one of the most significant pollutants in Pima County. In fact, it is estimated that breathing particulates causes about 200 premature deaths in Metropolitan Tucson each year. It is blamed for killing tens of thousands per year throughout the U.S., not to mention causing many health ailments along the way.

In 1999, Pima County violated the national air quality health standards for PM. We were able to blame the exceedences on high wind events and drought, and because of this, we avoided being designated as a “Non Attainment” area. (*Note: We do NOT want to be designated as “Non Attainment!”*) Instead, Pima County Department of Environmental Quality (PDEQ), along with community and industry stakeholders, developed the Natural Events Action Plan (NEAP). This plan is in place now and incorporates inspection and enforcement, and outreach and education programs to keep PM levels down and ensure cleaner air for us to breathe.

Should we expect dust to be in the air just because we live in the desert? A little dust, yes ... much dust, NO! If left alone, the topsoil of our desert lands naturally binds together forming a thin crust called desert pavement. Although fragile, this crust is strong enough to resist wind ... that is until it is disturbed by human activity. Any kind of earth moving or soil disturbing activity such as digging into it or driving over it, can kick up the dust while the activity is taking place, and also leaves the soil vulnerable to wind even weeks afterwards.

Although the NEAP is implemented by PDEQ, it is up to us all, yes, even YOU, to keep the dust down. Check out the ***Bust the Dust*** article in the next Scoop Newsletter for more information. If you can't wait, check out our website at www.deq.pima.gov/air/pcneap/Dust_info.htm, e-mail karen.wilhelmsen@deq.pima.gov, or phone PDEQ at 740.3340 with your questions or concerns.

Got Dust? Keep it Down!