

Driving Safely in a Haboob

Recent events remind us that there is more than traffic congestion and vehicle emissions to worry about when driving. Blowing dust storms, known as “haboob,” can blind visibility, creating unexpected and unsafe conditions for motorists. According to the Arizona State Department of Transportation (ADOT), an average of five people each year will die, and many others are injured in our state as a result of blinding dust storms. Dust storms are most common between the months of May and September in southern Arizona.

Dust storms have existed since...well, forever. And they aren't going away any time soon. HOWEVER, dust storms have become worse and more frequent globally due to human activity disturbing the topsoil crust on land. Disturbed open and vacant lands (like unpaved parking lots, special event lots, and lands cleared by developers) and agricultural activity contribute significantly to dust storms in Pima County.

Land owners and managers are responsible for taking reasonable precautions to keep particulates from becoming airborne on their property. Taking effective action will not only keep them in compliance with Title 17 regulations of the Pima County Code, but will improve roadway safety and the health of those who would otherwise breathe particulate-laden air. To keep dust down:

- Plant native, drought-tolerant vegetation
- Utilize wind breaks such as trees or wind fencing
- Use environmentally friendly dust suppressant products
- Avoid driving or parking on dirt lots
- Bar vehicular access with barricades and/or “No Trespassing” signs
- Water effectively
- Blade lands only when construction is soon to follow
- Ride off-road vehicles in designated areas only
- Use agricultural best management practices

So, what do you do when you're driving and a dust storm engulfs you? ADOT has some suggestions:

- If possible, pull off the road to a safe place. When you do stop:
 - Never stop in a travel lane
 - Set your emergency brake
 - Take your foot off the brake pedal so other drivers won't follow your tail lights thinking that you're driving on the road
 - Turn off all vehicle lights
 - Wait out the storm
 - Be careful when returning to the pavement as it may be slippery and pavement markings may be obscured
- Reduce speed suitable to limited visibility

- Turn your lights on if you continue driving
- Sound your horn intermittently
- Use the painted line striping to guide you

The best method for being safe from a haboob though, is to keep the dust down before wind blows. Take action. Be healthy.

Questions or Concerns?

For current road conditions log on to www.az511.com/ or call 511.

Click or call PDEQ at

www.deq.pima.gov/air/NEAP/dustinfo.html
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