USU Uintah Basin Partners with Local Industry to Solve Air Quality Issues

Receives Environmental Award from Vernal Chamber of Commerce
- USU Uintah Basin

Uintah Basin, Utah - Utah State University's (USU) Bingham Research Center has teamed up with local oil and gas industry partners to address emissions of pollution that can lead to high wintertime ozone. Their voluntary efforts have earned recognition for both industry and USU as they work towards mitigating ozone impacts while minimizing costs to industry.

“We are extremely proud of the Bingham Center team for leading collaborative efforts with industry to solve real issues impacting our local communities,” stated James Y. Taylor, associate vice president at USU Uintah Basin. “Recognition for their contributions are well deserved and represent one of many ways USU impacts the local communities they serve.”

USU’s Bingham Center earned the Environmental Award from the Vernal Area Chamber of Commerce for their collaboration with industry to identify ways to mitigate ozone-forming emissions. Some of their industry partners were also recognized as first-time recipients of the Leadership in Ozone Reduction Awareness award by the Uintah Basin’s Tri-County Health Department for their collaborative efforts with the Bingham Center. The award recognizes operators who took steps to reduce those ozone precursors during ozone events.

Bingham Center scientists have quantified atmospheric emissions that impact ozone, improved computer simulations of air chemistry used to understand and improve air quality, and answered fundamental questions about why and how wintertime ozone forms.

“Air quality issues are multi-faceted and impact the physical and economic health of our community,” said Seth Lyman, director of the Bingham Center. “Emissions from the oil and gas industry are part of the equation, but meteorology also has an impact, so it’s imperative to be able to isolate contributing factors.”

For the past two winters, the Bingham Center team has operated an email alert program to let the oil and gas industry know when poor air quality is forecast so industry can reduce ozone-forming emissions when it matters most. The program now has more than 100 participants, representing 15 local energy companies, as well as government entities and members of the public. Industry organizations helped design the program and have established seasonal and episodic emissions reduction guidelines that depend on it. They also helped establish a winter ozone working group where all stakeholders discuss local air quality issues and how to resolve them. They meet and communicate regularly with industry, government, and advocacy organizations to disseminate research results and general information about local air quality issues. This provides community leaders with the tools to proactively address air quality issues.

Bingham Center staff work closely with community partners to find solutions to a variety of air quality issues that impact the local community. Recently, they analyzed the chemical composition of smoke from burning gilsonite. TriCounty Health used this information to make recommendations to local firefighters about how to protect themselves while fighting wildfires that ignite gilsonite veins. They also conducted several surveys of emissions...
from oil and gas wells to determine survey techniques that are most effective and how industry can reduce emissions where possible.

To learn more about the USU Bingham Center and support available to industry, visit aq.usu.edu.

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