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CU study: Air-quality regulations miss pollutants

By Brittany Anas (Contact) Wednesday, September 24, 2008

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Air-quality regulations may be overlooking some of the pollutants that lead to hazy skies and poor air quality, according to new findings from the University of Colorado.

Researchers who monitored the Los Angeles area, and the smog-clouded skies covering that region, found that a much smaller percentage of haze than was previously thought comes directly from cars and industrial manufacturing.

Instead, 75 percent of the fine, organic pollutants form when reactive gases, called "volatile organic compounds," are exposed to the air and condense onto existing particles.

Ken Docherty, a researcher with the university's Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences, said the study shows that the secondary, or chemically formed particles, are contributing more significantly to poor air quality.

"Our study suggests that regulations need to focus much more attention on the gases — such as gasoline vapors — that form secondary organic particles and create visible haze," he said.

Some examples of volatile organic compounds include vapors from paints, cleaning supplies, automotive products and dry-cleaned clothing.

The study will be published in the journal Environmental Science and Technology.

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