

Air North Texas: A Clean Air Campaign implemented by the North Central Texas Council of Governments

Case Study Category: Communications
Jurisdiction: 16-County Dallas-Fort Worth Region (Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Erath, Hood, Hunt, Johnson, Kaufman, Navarro, Palo Pinto, Parker, Rockwall, Somervell, Tarrant, Wise)
Jurisdiction Population: 6.5 million
City/County Manager Name: Mindy Mize, Program Manager

Would you like the application to be considered for an Innovation Award?

No

Would you like the application to be considered for our Rapid Fire Session?

No

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About the Air North Texas Campaign

Currently, ten DFW area counties are in nonattainment for ozone, meaning their air quality exceeds what the Environmental Protection Agency considers healthy. Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Johnson, Kaufman, Parker, Rockwall, Tarrant and Wise Counties make up the nonattainment area.

Air North Texas is a public awareness campaign that encourages residents of the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) region to make clean air choices. Air North Texas was created in 2007 and launched in 2008, and is composed of a coalition of regional organizations committed to improving the air in DFW. Before Air North Texas launched, the DFW region had disjointed messages about air quality. Air North Texas is composed of a coalition of 25 regional partner organizations committed to improving the air in the DFW region, and aims to generate a consistent region-wide brand that promotes clean air behavior and lifestyle changes.

One way that Air North Texas has promoted consistent messaging is by creating a password-protected site where Air North Texas partners may log in and retrieve a variety of materials, including print advertisements, logos, press releases, social media messages and more. Partners may then use and distribute these materials as desired.

In 2010, after a request for a day to remind people about ozone season, Air North Texas implemented Clean Air Action Day. On Clean Air Action Day, Air North Texas asks North Texans to do one thing they've never done before to help improve air quality, such as carpool, walk or bike to work, take mass transit, etc. Clean Air Action Day is an annual event that falls on the first Friday of summer. More information about Clean Air Action Day can be found at www.airnorthtexas.org/cleanair.asp.

Air North Texas began a new ongoing initiative called "Be Air Aware" in the 2012 ozone season. The Be Air Aware initiative officially launched on May 4, 2012, and stresses the importance of taking action on Air Pollution Action Days and ozone exceedence days.

Air North Texas staff created three separate lists of tailored clean air strategies and messages for three separate target groups – businesses, governments and individuals. For example, the business and government messages feature strategies related to operations and employee communications, while the individual messages feature strategies relating to daily habits. All strategies can be found at www.airnorthtexas.org/beairaware.asp.

The Be Air Aware initiative encourages these three groups to commit to these strategies and implement them on Air Pollution Action Days. Health messages are stressed when ozone reaches unhealthy levels. Air North Texas sends Air Pollution Action Day Alerts to those who make commitments and/or sign up to receive alerts. Air North Texas promotes the Be Air Aware initiative through outreach, print and online advertising in English and Spanish, social media messaging and online videos.

The short-term goal of the Be Air Aware initiative is to reduce emissions and avoid ozone exceedence days. In the 2012 ozone season, the DFW region avoided ozone exceedence days on four occasions where Air Pollution Action Day Alerts were issued: May 18, June 9, June 28 and September 23.

The long-term goal of the Be Air Aware initiative is to reduce emissions and help move the DFW region into attainment for the pollutant ozone.

Costs and Savings

Excluding staff time, administrative costs and website maintenance, the Air North Texas campaign implementation costs are about \$150,000 per year. This includes the purchase of outreach items and online, print and radio advertisements.

Savings are acquired by teaming with Air North Texas partners to make educational outreach item purchases. For example, in 2013, Air North Texas teamed up with two partners, the City of Fort Worth and the North Texas Commission, to purchase air quality index beach balls. The logo of each contributing entity was placed on the beach balls. Air North Texas saved \$3,259 by making this purchase with partners rather than alone.

Additionally, Air North Texas saves advertising costs by sharing materials created by staff with partners. Partners use these materials (logos, advertisements, etc.) in their communication pieces which spreads the Air North Texas message to an audience Air North Texas staff would otherwise have to reach by utilizing paid advertising.

Finally, Air North Texas receives added value advertisements due to a significant amount of advertising space purchased each year.

Innovation

The Air North Texas campaign is innovative in its collaboration between partners, which allows leveraging of funds and the ability to reach a larger audience. Air North Texas staff generates materials, including outreach items, advertisements, press releases, AQI handouts, etc., and then shares them with partners. This saves partners, including local governments, staff time and funds since they are able to use materials produced and/or paid for by NCTCOG. It also allows Air North Texas partners to easily spread the message to an audience that Air North Texas staff would not be able to reach on their own.

Obstacles

Partner innovation is difficult to encourage. Although shared resources is a strength of the Air North Texas campaign, this aspect can lead to partner reliance on Air North Texas staff. For example, instead of creating and implementing their own methods of spreading the Air North Texas message, partners often opt to mimic our strategies. We address this challenge by highlighting partners who have shown innovation at our bi-monthly committee meetings. Innovative partners often present about their efforts, which inspires other partners to implement their own innovative efforts. Additionally, partners who have shown exceptional support of the campaign are recognized with Air North Texas Partner Awards at the end of each year. This is a great incentive for our partners to develop their own innovative campaign efforts.

Another obstacle is maintaining consistency in our air pollution alert language, as it is difficult to get all entities on the same page when it comes to the alert language. Our air pollution alert information is based on information received from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), and in 2013 they made several changes to the way they distribute and label air quality information which required us to change our language and alert distribution as well. This can be confusing to the general public and our partners, because they must become familiar with a new alert system and new language for the alerts. We addressed these issues with our partners by having several presentations about the changes at our bi-monthly task force meetings, by sending emails about the changes and having phone conversations with partners individually. For the general public, we eased into the changes and submitted articles explaining the changes to several publications. We made minimal changes to our alerts and website, making the language correct yet familiar. Additionally, we are working with the National Weather Service to attempt to create consistency among air pollution alert language and communication methods.

Outcomes

Currently, the success of the project is measured by the number of clean air strategy commitments received and the web traffic to www.airnorthtexas.org. Almost 10,000 clean air strategy commitments have been made since 2010, and visitors to the website increase steadily from year to year.

Over time, the success of the project can be measured by the region's design value from year-to-year, as well as number of ozone exceedence days throughout ozone season. As mentioned, four Air Pollution Warnings were avoided in the 2012 ozone season. Furthermore, it is estimated that approximately 40 pounds of NO_x emissions were prevented in the 2012 ozone season due to participation in Be Air Aware. For the 2013 ozone season, the DFW region is on track to meet the 1997 8-hour ozone standard.

Applicable Results and Real World Practicality

The real world practicality of Air North Texas lies in the basic concept behind the campaign – make small behavioral changes in order to improve air quality. These are things that are practical, simple and necessary in order for our region to move into attainment for ozone.

The applicable results of Air North Texas can be seen as we analyze the commitments made for each clean air strategy, then shift our advertising messages to focus on certain strategies that may not be gaining as much traction.

Additionally, this campaign can be used as a model for any government or nonprofit entity. The key to the success of Air North Texas lies in its partner relationships. Any entity attempting a grassroots awareness campaign can learn from the Air North Texas campaign by focusing on creating partnerships with entities who are dedicated to working with you to spread your message.