

## **Clearing the air:**

### **That air you're breathing may be slowly killing you**

By Amy Joi O'Donoghue , Deseret News

Published: Saturday, Aug. 11 2012 1:00 p.m. MDT

*Editor's note: This report is part one of a two-part series.*

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah has one of the worst air pollution problems in the country and the impacts are startling: The pollution is killing people.

It is sending families and individuals to hospital emergency rooms. It is contributing to strokes and heart attacks. Both young and old suffer asthma at greater rates in dirty air areas, and those with respiratory diseases are left wheezing and coughing, fighting a tightening in their lungs.

Business interests, often cited as a check against strict air quality standards, can actually feel the brunt of pollution as an economy slayer, as green businesses are chased away and local businesses lose out on potential employees and their families who don't want to live under the smothering canopy of a wintertime inversion or endure the blanket of stifling summer ozone.

Within the past four years, several counties in Utah became reluctant members of the dirty air club, taking their spots among the worst of the worst in the country when it comes to air quality and short-term pollution. On average, state air quality regulators insist that Utah's air quality is far from the worst, but when it does get bad, it's very bad.

On those days, the filthy air of highly populated areas like metropolitan New York City or Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area is surpassed on the Wasatch Front, as demonstrated in 2010 when the northern part of the state was locked in the grips of an unrelenting inversion and the EPA said the air here was the most polluted in the country.

Health studies during the past two decades have demonstrated the link between exposure to air pollutants and dangerous consequences to health. Utah County, in fact, was an early test tube of the correlation, where a Brigham Young University professor studied the link between a steel mill closure, improvement in children's respiratory health, and subsequent higher hospitalization rates — a doubling — when the mill reopened. That research by Arden Pope would later go on to lay the foundation for the federal agency's air quality standards in the 1990s.

Three national studies earlier this year have brought greater urgency to the problem, revealing that even short-term exposure to levels of pollution considered "safe" by federal standards bring immediate risks of heart attack and stroke.

With Utah fast approaching a deadline to submit a plan to come into federal compliance, a disturbing reality has emerged: Even making the standard will not bring clean air to Utah, and it will continue to reach into nearly every aspect of daily life.