



NASA Air Quality Applied Sciences Team

Earth Science Serving Air Quality Management Needs



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St. Louis Ozone Garden Gears Up For Its Second Year

Project supports air quality data, educates students and visitors with hands-on learning

ST. LOUIS – Nearly a year has gone by since St. Louis witnessed the completion of its first-ever ozone indicator garden, which attracted thousands of visitors, and now the project's organizers are looking forward to the start of a new growing season.

"We've been busy playing in the dirt ... preparing the ground and getting the plants ready," said Dr. Jack Fishman, director of the Center for Environmental Sciences (CES) at Saint Louis University (SLU) and the garden's primary organizer. "The perennials are starting to sprout already, data from the ozone monitor is online, and we have other plants in a greenhouse waiting to be transplanted."

The garden, which is free to visit, is located in a popular spot for educational fun, just steps away from the St. Louis Science Center and McDonnell Planetarium in Forest Park.

"I'm looking forward to planting some new types of ozone-tolerant and ozone-sensitive plants; we are trying soybeans and potatoes for the first time this year," said the garden's project manager, Kelley Belina. She works at the garden in the summer, observing leaf damage and collecting data with students.

Supported by funding from NASA's Air Quality Applied Sciences Team, CES, and SLU's President's Research Fund, the St. Louis Ozone Garden was designed to give the public a firsthand look at the impacts that ozone and poor air quality can have on living things. Fishman felt that an ozone indicator garden would be the most effective way to get people thinking about air quality in their daily lives.

"I think people hear about ozone, global warming and climate change, but it's hard to visualize," Fishman said. "With the garden, they can actually see the damage that's taking place because of an increase in pollutants, primarily ozone."

City residents might be especially interested in seeing the effects of air pollutants, since the American Lung Association ranked St. Louis 25th in the nation for ozone pollution and 12th for year-round particle pollution in a report released last week. Ozone is often highest in urban areas.

"People hear about air pollution in St. Louis, and they know it is bad for people and their lungs but they don't always think about plants and the environment," said Belina.

Ozone levels are high in summer, just when the plants will be in full bloom. Despite a few tweaks to implement this time around, such as keeping out bugs and rabbits, the garden's organizers are excited and proud of what they have already achieved. Fishman hopes they will be able to add more educational programs, and also spark the creation of more ozone gardens in the long term.

"We learned things along the way last year and are hoping we can see better indications of ozone damage this season," he said.

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NASA Air Quality Applied Sciences Team, a nationwide collaborative research team, serves the needs of air quality managers in the U.S. by analyzing a variety of data from NASA satellites, models and suborbital platforms. AQAST researchers aim to provide the public with high-quality resources. Find out more online at aqast.org.