

<https://iaq.works/indoor-air/national-air-quality-awareness-week-2021/>

National Air Quality Awareness Week 2021

As we transition from spring to summer, many Americans are spending more time outdoors. Throughout May and June, the weather warms and the days grow longer. The shift from mainly indoor to indoor-outdoor living makes May the perfect time to celebrate clean air. May is not only Clean Air Month, but the first week also features [Air Quality Awareness Week](#).

Air Quality Awareness Week 2021

2021 marks the 15th annual Air Quality Awareness Week (AQWA). This year, the theme is Healthy Air—Important for Everyone! Beginning the first Monday in May, the five-day event also features daily themes. The goal of AQWA is to generate greater public air quality awareness, promote educational events and encourage the public to check the local air quality every day. AQWA is sponsored by several U.S. agencies including the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Weather Service, among others.

What Is Air Quality Awareness?

You may be asking yourself, what actually is air quality awareness? Is it simply knowledge of what air is, or how to determine air quality? Not quite. Air quality awareness means having a greater understanding of the health and environmental impacts of air quality. It implies an understanding of indoor air quality and outdoor air quality, and how the [two are related](#). It acknowledges how one's specific locale and climate affects air quality and air pollution. Air quality awareness is understanding why the air we breathe matters and how air quality impacts us.

How To Improve Your Own Understanding of Air Quality

The first step is literal awareness. That is, being informed about the surrounding air quality. For this reason, the most consistent suggestion

throughout AQAW is to routinely check the [Air Quality Index](#) (AQI). We suggest making it a regular habit. Check the AQI when you wake up in the morning, or simply take note of it whenever you usually check the weather. Consider the AQI when planning outdoor events or activities. It's a simple task and a quick habit that has a big impact.

When aware of outdoor air quality, you'd be surprised how quickly you choose to wait to walk the dog for an hour to see if the "unhealthy for sensitive groups" decreased to "moderate" air quality. The AQI is a helpful tool that measures five major air pollutants and groups them into air quality ratings. Ranging from 0–300+ with associated colors and labels, the index is a helpful tool to determine potential health risks of current air pollution levels. More than likely, you have seen AQI ratings before, but simply glossed right over them. Instead, choosing to be aware of air quality means stopping and recognizing the implications of local air pollution.

Don't Forget About Indoor Air Quality!

When it comes to improving indoor air quality awareness, the first step is recognizing the role IAQ plays in our everyday indoor environments. Before the pandemic, a lot of people had never even heard the term indoor air quality, let alone stopped to consider the air in their indoor spaces.

Indoor air quality awareness means understanding that there are indoor sources of pollution, in addition to outdoor sources. Proximity to a landfill or a major highway is an outdoor source that impacts IAQ. The [cleaning products](#) used, the ingredients and chemicals in them and where they're stored in your space is an indoor source that impacts IAQ. Make sure to take note of the likely indoor and outdoor sources affecting your space.

Also, begin to research IAQ control options and available home upgrades. There are solutions available to improve the indoor air quality in your home, business, office—every indoor space. Finally, if you want a more explicit examination, consider a formal air quality assessment. Trained and experienced HVAC contractors can test the air quality in your home and offer personalized recommendations.

Air Quality Awareness Week Ideas

In addition to the week's Healthy Air theme, each day has a specific topic. Here are a couple of ways to increase your own awareness and ideas to improve air quality for each day of AQAW.

Monday: Wildfires and Smoke

The biggest threat from smoke and fire is particulate matter. These are fine particles originating from burned materials and organic matter. Particle pollution is a significant health threat because it penetrates deep into the lungs.

Improving air filtration is the best IAQ control method to protect your health from environmental smoke and during wildfire season. Upgrading filtration can mean adding an air purifier or literally installing better air filters. High-efficiency air filters, those with MERV ratings between 13–16 reduce the number of indoor air pollutants up to [95%](#). We suggest choosing MERV 13, which is the best home filter upgrade that won't compromise airflow.

Another option is to invest in HEPA-level portable air cleaners or install a whole-home purification system. Air purifiers are a great healthy home addition and helpful defense against wildfires and excessive outdoor smoke. Consider taking these steps now, at the start of wildfire season!

Tuesday: Asthma and Your Health

For asthma sufferers, or anyone living with a respiratory condition or disease, you know that air quality matters. When lung health is already vulnerable, air quality plays a direct role in symptom and disease management. Checking AQI is particularly important for those with greater lung risks. Intervening in your home and improving air quality is also incredibly important. This is because air pollution can trigger asthma attacks and worsen respiratory symptoms. The best way to avoid said triggers indoors is by minimizing the amount of pollutants in the first place.

Wednesday: Citizen Science and Sensors

Wednesday's theme emphasizes the importance of both community involvement and local air quality monitoring. On this day, see how you can get

involved in your local community or advocate for improved air quality locally. Citizen Science Air Monitors is an example of a local volunteer [air quality project](#) put on by the EPA and a community group to measure air quality in Newark, New Jersey.

Thursday: Environmental Justice and Air Quality

Environmental justice and air quality mean recognizing who is most [at risk](#) from the threat of air pollution. This includes:

- Children
- Pregnant women
- Those with heart and lung diseases or preexisting health conditions
- Lower-income or people living in poverty
- Elderly
- People who regularly work outside
- Those who work in areas with high air pollution levels
- People who live near major outdoor sources

On this day, take the time to recognize that roughly 40% of Americans live in areas with unhealthy air quality. Equally important, those unhealthy air areas are predominantly low-income and/or minority communities. A recent [study](#) found that particulate matter disproportionately affects people of color across America. One way to improve overall air quality for all groups is to advocate for greater, more regulated air quality monitoring.

Friday: Air Quality Around the World

Taking a global perspective, air quality around the world covers a few important air quality awareness topics. First, air quality and air pollution do not have borders. Consider a small-scale example. If your neighbor uses a wood-burning stove, that affects your home's air quality too.

For this themed day, also note that AirNow provides global air quality information. AirNow collects air quality data from U.S. embassies and consulates around the world, providing real-time air quality data for numerous locations.

Choose Clean Air Today

Understanding the full extent of air quality and how to minimize air pollution can be overwhelming. The good news? There are steps you can take today to improve the air you breathe in your own indoor space. Start in your own home or start local, but realize you can start immediately to ensure cleaner air.

Improving your space's indoor air quality can be as simple as implementing [healthy home habits](#) or investing in IAQ home upgrades. We offer many resources and guides on how to pursue IAQ control solutions and upgrades. We can also help you find a local IAQ expert to come up with a targeted plan to improve your home's air quality.