



Morongo Band of Mission Indians Environmental Protection Department

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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2026 Annual Earth Day Event

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The Morongo Environmental Protection Department is proud to share that our Annual Earth Day Event was a tremendous success this year. Despite having to navigate several date changes during the planning process, everything ultimately worked out for the best. The day of the event brought beautiful weather, creating the perfect atmosphere for a fun, educational, and engaging community celebration.



We would like to extend our sincere thanks to everyone who came out to support the event. This year's Earth Day featured 35 vendors representing a diverse range of organizations, including environmental groups, neighboring Tribal communities, local agencies, and our own Morongo schools. Their participation helped create a meaningful experience for attendees of all ages and highlighted the importance of environmental stewardship, sustainability, and community involvement.

We are especially grateful to the Morongo community and Tribal Council for their continued support and the resources provided to make this event possible. Their commitment to environmental education and community engagement plays a vital role in the success of programs and events like Earth Day.

With more than 400 attendees joining us throughout the day, this year's event was one of our most successful yet. It was inspiring to see so many community members come together to learn, connect, and celebrate our shared responsibility to care for the environment.

Thank you to all of our vendors, volunteers, staff, community members, and supporters who helped make this year's Earth Day Event such a memorable occasion. We look forward to continuing this tradition and seeing everyone again next year.



Photo Credit: Kim Loppnow

Our mission is to protect and preserve Morongo's natural resources, traditions, and tribal sovereignty. We promote self-governance, environmental awareness and environmentally considerate actions by exemplifying environmental stewards, fostering collaborative relationships, expanding education and outreach activities, and continuing to enrich and develop our programs.

Burn Smart, Burn Where You Buy

Written by: Zane Tatro, Environmental Specialist I



**BUY
LOCAL
BURN
LOCAL**

DON'T MOVE FIREWOOD

As we move into the warmer, drier months here on the Morongo Reservation, fire safety becomes an increasingly important responsibility for all of us. Whether you are clearing yard debris, conducting traditional practices, or managing vegetation on your property, it is critical to follow safe and responsible burning practices to protect our community, natural resources, and cultural lands.

One important principle to keep in mind is “burn where you buy.” This means that materials intended for burning, such as firewood or green waste, should be sourced locally and used within the same area whenever possible. Transporting wood or plant material from other regions can introduce invasive pests and diseases that threaten local ecosystems and traditional plant resources. Once established, invasive species can outcompete native plants, alter wildlife habitat, increase wildfire risks, and cause long term damage to the natural resources that are important to the Morongo community. By using local materials, we help preserve the health of Morongo's natural environment.

Why Responsible Burning Matters

Uncontrolled or poorly managed burns can quickly become wildfires, especially under dry and windy conditions common in our region. These fires can damage homes, infrastructure, and culturally significant areas. Smoke from burns can also impact air quality, affecting elders, children, and those with respiratory conditions.

Practicing safe burning is not only about preventing fires—it's about protecting community health, honoring the land, and maintaining our responsibility as stewards of these resources.

Before Conducting Any Burn

Before conducting any individual controlled, personal, or ceremonial burns on the Morongo Reservation, individuals are required to notify the Morongo Fire Department. Providing advance notice helps ensure burns are conducted safely and allows the Fire Department to be aware of burning activities taking place within the community.

Morongo Fire Department Non-Emergency Contact Information

- Phone: 951-849-7193

- Email: fireadministration@morong-nsn.gov

Best Practices for Safe Burning

- Burn only clean, dry, and untreated materials
- Never leave a fire unattended
- Keep fires small and manageable
- Fully extinguish all embers before leaving the site
- Avoid burning during red flag warnings or poor air quality conditions

Working Together as a Community

Fire prevention is a shared responsibility. By following safe burning practices, notifying the Morongo Fire Department before burns, and using locally sourced materials, we reduce wildfire risk, protect our environment, and support the long-term health of the Reservation.

Photos from: Dewey Pest Control-<https://dewypest.com/news/winter-pest-control-california/>; Official Pest Prevention-<https://www.officialpestprevention.com/warning-signs-ant-infestation-california/>



RESOURCE CONSERVATION

Proper Disposal of Tanks and Cylinders

Written by: Isabel Hughes, Environmental Specialist I

Many households use tanks and cylinders every day for cooking, cooling systems, medical needs, parties, and automotive purposes. Common examples include oxygen tanks, refrigerant cylinders, propane tanks, helium tanks, and nitrous oxide (NOS) containers. While these items serve important purposes, they can pose significant environmental risks when they are improperly disposed of or abandoned in unauthorized locations.



These tanks are pressurized and may still contain hazardous materials even when they appear empty. When left in the canyons, along roadways, or in illegal dumping areas, they can leak chemicals, create fire/explosion hazards, and negatively impact wildlife and the surrounding environment. Improperly discarded tanks may also pose dangers to community members and Morongo staff responsible for cleanup efforts.

Recently, there has been an increase in the number of NOS containers being found in the canyons and along the Reservation roadways. While individuals may choose to partake in activities involving NOS, it is important that the containers are disposed of responsibly afterward. Abandoning these canisters contributes to litter, environmental pollution, and potential safety hazards throughout the Reservation. To help reduce illegal dumping and protect our environment, Morongo community members may and are encouraged drop off oxygen tanks, refrigerant cylinders, propane tanks, helium tanks, NOS containers, and similar pressurized cylinders at Public Works for proper recycling and disposal. If you or someone you know uses NOS canisters, please dispose of the empty containers in the grey roll-top bin located specific to hazardous waste at Public Works. These items should never be placed in regular household trash bins or left outdoors.

By properly recycling tanks and cylinders, we can all work together to keep the Reservation clean, safe, and protected for future generations. For more information on proper hazardous and universal waste disposal, see our Waste and Recycling Guide for the Morongo Reservation at, https://morongo.sfo2.digitaloceanspaces.com/morongo.com/-WasteRecyclingGuide2025_web.pdf.



Which Bugs Are in the Water?

Written by: Oscar Perez, Environmental Specialist II

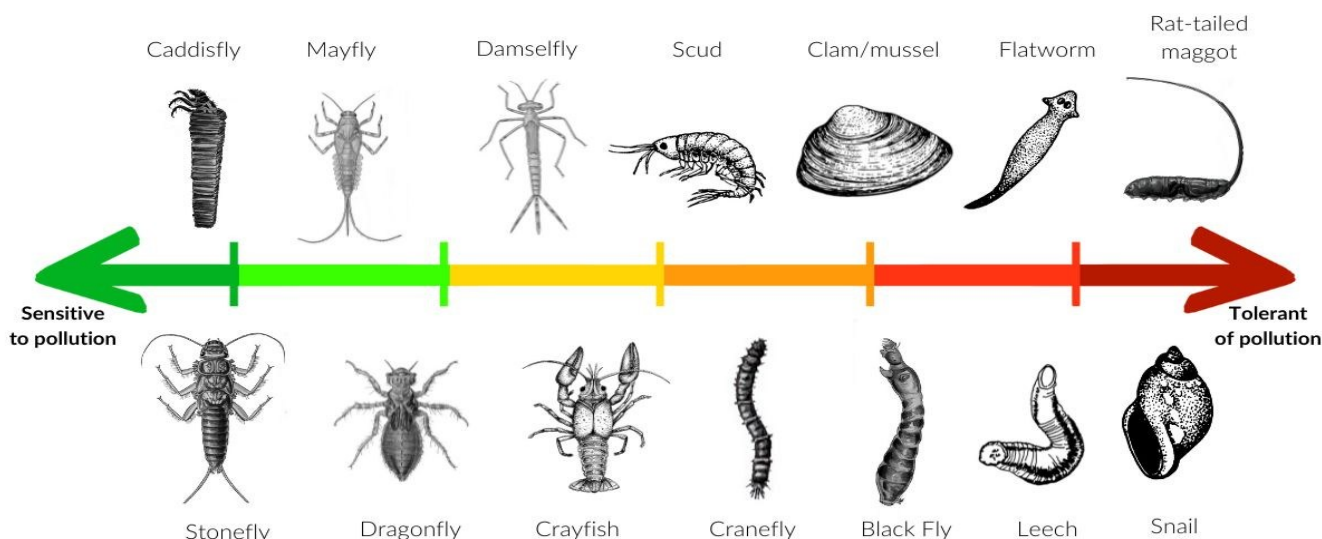
The bugs that you see in lakes, rivers, and streams are most likely benthic macroinvertebrates, like the bugs found in the photo to the right. By definition, *benthic* refers to bottom dwellers, and *macroinvertebrates* refers to small animals with no backbone. Although they are small, most can be seen with the naked eye and do not require a microscope. They make up the larval and adult life stages of many insects. They can be found swimming around rocks and vegetation, as well as on the sand and bottoms of waterways.



Something so small may seem insignificant, but these bugs are important. Benthic macroinvertebrates are a good indicator of how a waterbody is doing. That is why Morongo's Environmental Protection Department conducts a bioassessment annually. While conducting a bioassessment of a waterbody, staff can observe these organisms and even collect them for professional identification by experts. They are used to determine the biological condition of the waterbody. That being said, the greater the diversity present, the healthier the waterbody is. Another key aspect is knowing which types of benthic macroinvertebrates are present, as some species are more tolerant of pollution than others. As seen in the picture below, the more caddisflies and stoneflies that are present, the less polluted the waterbody is, compared to one containing only snails and other pollution tolerant species.

The importance of benthic macroinvertebrates cannot be overstated. They consume things like algae, plants, and woody debris. They are known as shredders, collectors, grazers, and predators. Without them, waterways become clogged with leaf litter. They help maintain nutrient cycling in waterways and serve as food for larger animals such as fish, amphibians, birds, and mammals. Unlike many other animals, benthic macroinvertebrates have very limited mobility and spend most, if not all, of their lives within a single waterway. They cannot move from one waterway to another. That is why it is important to protect them and keep our waterways clean.

Example of benthic macroinvertebrates and their tolerant level to pollution.



References: Macroinvertebrates ID— <https://www.macroinvertebrates.org/key>;
 EPA- <https://www.epa.gov/national-aquatic-resource-surveys/indicators-benthic-macroinvertebrates>;
 Macroinvertebrates – <https://www.macroinvertebrates.org>

TRIBAL WATER PROGRAM

EPA Targeted Airshed Grant Project Update

Written by: Pamela Atcitty, Tribal Air Program Manager



New Tier 3 Generator at Public Works.

The Morongo Tribal Air Program is pleased to share significant progress on the EPA Targeted Airshed Grant project, which is helping reduce air pollution and improve air quality throughout the Morongo Indian Reservation. Due to the success of the project and the remaining opportunities to further reduce emissions, the grant has been extended for an additional two years.

A major milestone has already been achieved with the replacement of 10 aging diesel-powered emergency generators with cleaner, more efficient Tier 3 models. These upgrades have been completed at the Old Fire Station, Social Services, Tribal Hall, Upper Campus, Community Center, two drinking water well facilities, the Old Travel Center, Public Works, the Wastewater Treatment Plant, and the Cable Department. These facilities provide critical

services to the community and rely on dependable backup power during emergencies and public safety power outages.

The new generators produce significantly fewer emissions while maintaining reliable standby power for essential community operations. By modernizing this equipment, the Tribe has taken an important step toward reducing localized air pollution and protecting community health. When fully implemented, the generator upgrade portion of the project is expected to reduce emissions by approximately 35 tons of nitrogen oxides (NOx), 3 tons of volatile organic compounds (VOCs), 4.8 tons of carbon monoxide (CO), and 5.7 tons of particulate matter (PM) annually. Over a ten-year period, these reductions are projected to exceed 350 tons of NOx, 30 tons of VOCs, 48 tons of CO, and 57 tons of PM.

With the grant extension, the Tribe is proposing to expand the project by replacing up to two additional emergency generators and converting additional gasoline-powered lawn and garden equipment to battery-powered alternatives. All replacement equipment will be owned and operated by the Morongo Tribal Government and will be used exclusively by the Tribe.



New Tier 3 Generator at Waste Water Treatment Plant.

In addition to reducing emissions, the transition to battery-powered landscaping equipment will also reduce noise, lower maintenance requirements, and create healthier working conditions for Tribal staff.

The Morongo Reservation continues to experience air quality impacts from major highways and rail lines and other off-reservation pollution sources. By targeting local emission sources that the Tribe can directly control, Morongo is taking meaningful action to improve air quality where community members live, work, learn, and gather.

The Morongo Tribal Air Program remains committed to identifying practical and effective solutions that improve air quality while supporting the Tribe's long-term environmental stewardship goals. We appreciate the continued support of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and look forward to sharing future project accomplishments with the community.

For more information about the Targeted Airshed Grant, contact Pam Atcitty at 951-755-5176.



Where Does the AQI Number Come From?

Written by: Bianca Sandoval, Environmental Specialist I



If you have ever driven around the Morongo Reservation, you might have noticed the flag pole at the schools. The flags that fly off these poles are a part of the Morongo School Flag Program. The color of the flags correspond to the colors of the Air Quality Index (AQI). Each color represents what the air quality is for that day and how you should plan for any outdoor activities. Below is a chart of what each color signifies.

For example, green represents good air quality and that it is safe to be outside, while purple represents very poor air quality and that it would be best to move all activities indoors. Now you might notice that each level has a range of numbers. What are these numbers? What or how are these numbers

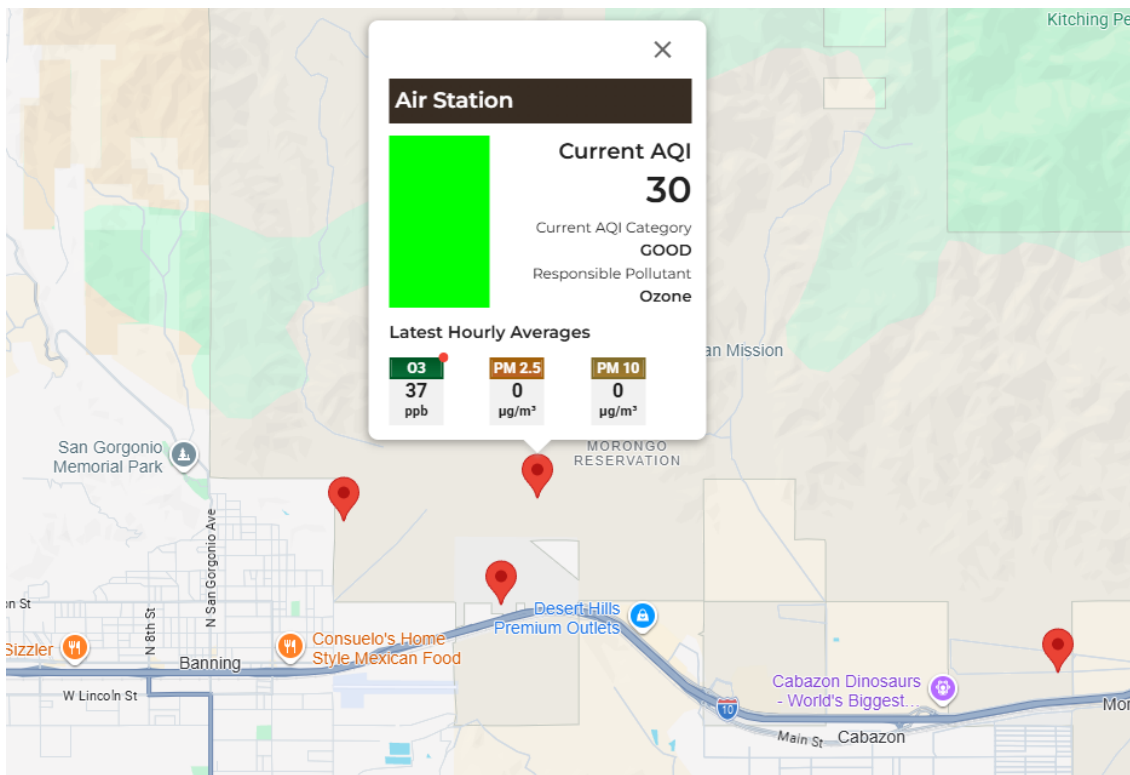


Good	0-50	Green
Moderate	51-100	Yellow
Unhealthy for sensitive groups	101-150	Orange
Unhealthy	151-200	Red
Very Unhealthy	201-300	Purple
Hazardous	301-500	Dark Purple

made?

This AQI measurement is determined by measuring the amount of the six criteria pollutants that are in the air. These are ozone, particulate matter (PM) 2.5, particulate matter (PM) 10, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen dioxide. The raw numbers from these measurements are converted into a standardized scale from 0 to 500. However, it is important to note that each pollutant will be measured separately and the one with the highest score will become the overall AQI score for that area.

Having a singular AQI score makes it easier for the general public to clearly understand what their current air quality is as opposed to being given a raw pollutant concentration. Your local AQI score can be found in several places, like MorongoAir.com (pictured below), airnow.gov, map.purpleair.com, or even on most weather apps on your phone!



References:
How Is AQI Measured?
The Science Behind the Number - *Biology Insights*

<https://biologyinsights.com/how-is-aqi-measured-the-science-behind-the-number/>

TRIBAL AIR PROGRAM

Oops! Trash in the Recycle Bin?

Written by: Isabel Hughes, Environmental Specialist I

Each year, the Morongo Environmental Protection Department's Pollution Prevention Program conducts a residential curbside recycling bin assessment throughout the Reservation. This assessment helps our department identify common recycling issues and determine what educational materials and outreach efforts should be prioritized within the community. It also allows us to identify specific waste streams that may require additional attention to improve recycling practices across the Reservation.

The purpose of this assessment is to reduce the amount of trash and other non-recyclable materials being placed in residential recycling bins. Our goal is to inspect every residential recycling bin to better understand where community members may need assistance or friendly reminders regarding proper recycling practices. When contamination is found, an "Oops Tag" is placed on the recycling bin identifying the materials that were incorrectly disposed of. These tags help inform residents about what was found in their recycling bin and serve as a reminder of proper recycling practices.

This year's most common violations included pizza boxes contaminated with food residue, plastic bags, recyclables placed inside trash bags, flimsy plastics, bubble wrap, and unwashed food and pet food containers. Pizza boxes that contain grease or food residue should be placed in the trash, while clean portions may be recycled. Plastic bags, flimsy plastics, and bubble wrap should never be placed in curbside recycling bins and should instead be taken to designated plastic film recycling collection locations. If you choose not to recycle bags, they can go into the trash. Recyclable materials should be placed loose in the recycling bin rather than inside trash bags. Food and pet food containers should be emptied, rinsed, and cleaned before being recycled.

Although a significant amount of flimsy plastic was found during this year's assessment, we were encouraged to see that the majority of residents were properly sorting paper, cardboard, cans, and bottles. While separating recyclables may seem like a small action, it has a meaningful impact on the environment by conserving resources, reducing landfill waste, and supporting a more sustainable community. It also contributes to the reduction of waste disposal fees for the Tribe.

The Morongo Environmental Protection Department appreciates all community members who take the time to recycle properly. Your efforts make a difference and demonstrate that our ongoing recycling education and outreach programs are helping to build a cleaner and healthier Reservation for everyone.



RECYCLE RIGHT!

Small actions make a BIG difference!

Thank you
for helping keep our
community clean
and green!

PIZZA BOXES

— RECYCLE RIGHT —

 **YES!** Recycle clean pizza boxes.
Remove any leftover food and grease.



 **NO!** Do not recycle pizza boxes with food, grease or sauce on them.
Place in the trash.



 **WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!**

CLEAN OUT FOOD CONTAINERS

— BEFORE RECYCLING —

 **YES!** Empty all food and liquid.
Rinse containers if possible.
Recycle the clean container.



 **NO!** Do not recycle containers with food or liquid left in them.
They belong in the trash.



 **EMPTY. RINSE. RECYCLE.**

NO FLIMSY PLASTIC

— IN THE RECYCLE BIN —

 **NO!** Do not place flimsy plastic in your recycle bin.
This includes:

- Plastic bags
- Produce bags
- Bubble wrap
- Plastic wrap
- Packaging film



 **YES!** Take these items to a designated plastic film recycling drop-off location.



RECYCLE PLASTIC FILM HERE!

 **KEEP PLASTIC BAGS AND FILM OUT OF THE RECYCLE BIN.**

 Thank you for doing your part to protect our environment and support a cleaner, healthier Morongo!



We've got many ways you can stay informed about our department programs, events, and alerts. We encourage you to sign up, like, & follow us in the following ways:



Quarterly Newsletter—Sign up for digital or paper copies at



www.morongonation.org/contact-environmental/



Facebook — @MorongoEPD



Instagram — @morongoepd



YouTube — Morongo EPD



Website — morongonation.org/environmental-protection-department



Email — epd@morongo-nsn.gov



Phone — 951-755-5127

This and previous newsletters are available at <https://morongonation.org/environmental/>. If you would like to join our email list, let us know at epd@morongo-nsn.gov or 951-755-5127.

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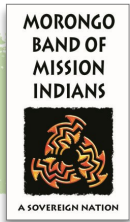


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