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Dear Client:

Record-setting extreme heat. Almost no rain. The worst drought in the nation. Lowest lake levels in almost a half century. Water use restrictions. Is there anything positive about this searing summer weather? Well, maybe.

No doubt it is hard to find a good weather case scenario this summer. But we may have scraped one up, with the help of the Lower Colorado River Authority meteorologist **Bob Rose**. Because of all the other extreme weather conditions, it may have slipped by you that **there have been very few Ozone Action Days this summer. And weather is a major factor in this.**

Excess ozone (or pollution) causes problems for active adults and children and those with respiratory disease, if they engage in outdoor activity. Additionally, too many Ozone Action Days can result in the imposition of federal controls and guidelines that affect various local businesses and impact your daily routine.

Rose says it takes three ingredients to push pollution above acceptable levels: 1) plenty of **Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs)**, 2) **bright sunshine** and 3) **weak winds** that keep the atmosphere from mixing. A fourth factor may also add to the problem – **east winds** bringing excess ozone from areas like Houston.

“This summer, we’ve had plenty of VOCs and almost every day has been sunny,” said Rose. **“But the wind has been near or slightly above normal this summer, causing good mixing in the lower atmosphere. This has kept excess ozone from developing.”** What’s that old saying about summer breezes?

The wind tally at the airport monitoring station each month, according to Rose:
June, average wind speed was 9.4 mph (long-term average is 8.0 mph) ...
July, average wind speed was 8.4 mph (long-term average is 6.9 mph) ... and in
August, the average wind speed was 7.6 mph (long-term average is 6.5 mph).

Yeah, Bob, but we had a few Ozone Action Days this week. What about that? He says the wind came out of the east, following a weak cold front that dropped high temps into the 90s. **“I believe the weather pattern this summer actually limited the number of bad ozone days despite the high number of 100-degree days. We can thank the summer breezes and the wind being mostly out of the south and southeast rather than the east,”** Rose concludes.

While important, weather is obviously not the only factor in air pollution. And if Austin area pollution levels consistently exceed federal air quality standards, the penalties are severe.

The villains in air pollution are the Volcanic Organic Compounds (VOCs). The weather plays a role in the *level* of VOCs in various areas. The Clean Air Act of 1990 established National Ambient Air Quality Standards. If a region frequently exceeds those standards, it can be held to be in “non-attainment.” **If such a “non-attainment” status is decreed by the feds, then controls can be imposed that many feel will severely impact certain businesses and activities.**

The Austin area, while improving, is teetering close to reaching the “non-attainment” level. This is why you need to keep a close eye on the Ozone Action Days designation. **Those are days weather conditions are deemed to be favorable for pollution levels to rise.** On Ozone Action Days, residents are urged to hold down pollutants in the air by running lawn mowers in the cool of the day, filling up the family jalopy after the sun goes down, etc.

What are the consequences if the feds drop the “non-attainment” hammer on the Austin area? **Tougher emissions standards will be imposed on various businesses that currently operate in the area and on those companies that may be considering a move to Austin.** For example, companies relying upon transportation would be affected, as would high tech companies that emit VOCs.

The word is that the Environmental Protection Agency will rule next March whether the Austin area has reached the “non-attainment” standard.

Decades from now, old-timers will probably lean back in their rocking chairs and opine about the “Summer of Oh-9.” And they may have a lot to talk about.

You know what you have lived through this summer. But look at it from a **historical perspective.** Some examples from the meteorological summer of June 1st to August 31st:

The month of July was the hottest July on record. The month of August was the hottest August on record. Check this stat: the average high temperature for August, as measured at Camp Mabry in Central Austin, was 101.7 degrees.

Don't forget the drought. Rainfall between June 1st and August 31st was among the Top Ten *lowest* on record. And looking back, **the past 24 months are now among the driest 24-month non-overlapping periods on record.** “Yessirree, son, you don't know what ‘hot and dry’ is all about. Why, back in the summer of oh-9, we were fryin’ eggs on the sidewalk ...”.

As this first week of classes unfolded at UTAustin, pity the poor freshmen who find themselves surrounded by 50,000 other students. Or should they be pitied?

In the not-too-distant past, the teenagers were on their own – getting lost on the way to class and confronted by the emotional challenges of being alone and away from home for the first time. **It was especially tough for kids who came from Texas towns whose *total* population was well below the *student* population.**

For the past three years, a new and innovative program is “humanizing” this large public university. It is doing this by **developing smaller communities and learning groups** for those who are beginning their first year at UTAustin. Some examples:

Freshmen are encouraged to join a First-Year Interest Group. This group of 25 students **takes the same classes together and meets with mentors** once a week to discuss class work and practical questions of living away from home the first time

Fifty outstanding UT teachers chose their favorite books to discuss with small groups of first-year students – hoping to **prepare the students for the intellectual challenges of their first semester at college.**

This fall, 108 Signature Courses are offered. These are interdisciplinary classes designed to **introduce freshmen to the best teachers at the University and to the world class libraries and museums.** These small seminars allow a student to be able to dive into topics such as Shakespeare, technology, the environment, business, ethics, etc.

The University Lecture Series engages students in conversation about the serious issues of the day and creates a shared intellectual experience with fellow students. **The lecturers include scholars, scientists and civic leaders.**

And for those 18-year-olds who have not decided on a career path, a new **Center for Strategic Advising will assist undecided majors** to discover their passion and to ultimately select a major.

All this grew out of a report from the Commission of 125 that was charged, upon UTAustin’s 125th anniversary, to **re-assess the mission of the University.** Instead, of various recommendations gathering dust on a shelf when the Commission’s work was completed, a new undergraduate core curriculum has evolved. The elements listed above are part of that process.

“We are striving to make UT a welcome and nurturing environment for all our students, but especially for students who are coming to campus for their first year,” said President Bill Powers. Quite a change from years past when many freshmen struggled to make the transition to big-time college life and to face the challenges that were a part of the evolution.

Heads up, UTAustin. You need to ratchet up efforts to recruit top-flight faculty from one of the nation's most acclaimed universities. Yep, Stanford University is in a heap of trouble.

Most outsiders don't understand the hotly competitive nature of great institutions of higher education. **World-class professors are highly coveted and institutions go to great lengths to lure the best and future-best scholars.**

As we have reported previously, **UTAustin is financially sound and has a stated goal to be the best public university in the land.** And, right now, a renowned private university is, as they say in West Texas, "ripe for the pickin'."

Stanford University has laid off 412 people and eliminated their jobs. It plans to get rid of 60 more people by the end of the year. It said the cuts were necessary due to a "precipitous decline in the value of the university's endowment."

Last year Stanford's endowment was worth \$17.2 billion. It is now predicting a 30% drop to about \$12 billion by year end.

This isn't all. **Stanford has announced it will not fill 50 open faculty jobs. It has frozen salaries** and stopped some \$1.1 billion worth of construction work. Campus departments will spend less on travel, food, marketing, computers, printing and conferences. **And the university will close its physics library.**

This is serious stuff. **Stanford has long been noted as among the best of the best. It is a great university.** But with the stresses Stanford is now facing, UTAustin is in a prime position to cherry-pick sitting faculty and, especially, to recruit other faculty members who might have been considering Stanford.

Dr. Louis Overholster says things are so bad at Stanford ATM's give out IOUs. And when a prof orders a burger at McDonald's, the kid behind the counter asks "Can you *afford* fries with that?"

Sincerely



Editor/Publisher