



EMBARGOED UNTIL 1 AM, 4/18/18

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Still Among the Worst: Pittsburgh Region Fails Again On Air Quality

Repetitive, Multi-Year, Multi-Criteria Failures Indicate Leadership's Complacency on Poor Air Quality

Pittsburgh, PA – The American Lung Association's (ALA) annual "State of the Air" (SOTA) report for 2018 again puts the Pittsburgh-New Castle-Weirton, PA-OH-WV metro area on notice that the air quality in the region remains among the worst in the nation. Allegheny County once again received straight Fs for ozone, daily particulate matter levels and long-term particulate matter levels. This was the only county outside of California to get straight Fs for all three measures of air pollution.

The report is based on data for the years 2014-2016. For the daily measure for fine particle pollution, the metro area's rank fell from 17th worst in the country to 10th worst out of 201 areas. Of all counties in Pennsylvania, only Allegheny County experienced an increase in the frequency of unhealthy days for this pollutant (from 6.0 to 8.5 days). The frequency of high particle pollution days was the highest for any county east of Utah.

The Pittsburgh region was one of four regions with an increase in the number of "spikes" in particles, the other three being on the west coast. The Pittsburgh region was one of six regions among the top 25 worst performers to have higher particle levels year-round: Los Angeles; Pittsburgh; Lancaster, Pa.; Birmingham, Ala.; Harrisburg-York-Lebanon, Pa.; and Las Vegas.

For the annual particle measure, the three-year average got worse when compared to last year, increasing from 12.6 to 12.8 micrograms per cubic meter. Despite this deterioration in air quality, the metro area's rank for annual particulates held steady overall as the 8th worst air in the country out of 187 places. The Pittsburgh region has occupied this spot for the third report in a row. The metro area is tied with the Lancaster, Pa. area as the worst air in the country outside of California.

The Pittsburgh metro area also showed poor performance for ground level ozone. While the three-state, 12-county metro area showed general improvement, Allegheny County levels remained high enough that the metro area still ranked 32nd worst out of 227 areas across the country for ozone.

For particulate matter, the region showed no improvement in overall ranking over the past 3 years and Allegheny County experienced a deterioration in air quality, as measured by high particle days and the three-year design value.

Clean air and public health advocacy leaders, as well as regional citizens, continue to demonstrate so that citizens have the right to breathe healthy, clean air and that we should not die from dirty air. The results point to a lack of leadership on regional air quality. These advocates call upon the region's leaders to impose substantial and escalating fines on companies that repeatedly violate their air permits and make our air dirtier. In addition, they call for more transparent reporting to the public about air pollution from industrial facilities in order to increase accountability and require steady reductions in harmful and hazardous air pollutants.

"We should feel confident knowing that the air we breathe won't make us sick. We have the right to live and work in clean, safe and healthy environments," stated Matthew Mehalik, director of the Breathe Project. "We must stand up when our health is exchanged for corporate profits, just as we did when we forced the tobacco industry to be transparent about what they put in cigarettes. When we band together, we can make sure our government puts our health first."

According to John Graham of Clean Air Task Force, "A comparison of PM2.5 levels between 2013 and 2016 shows that on average, monitors in Allegheny County improved a very modest 0.3 ug/m3 while average reductions in surrounding counties in western Pennsylvania, and across the border into Ohio and West Virginia, ranged from 1.5 to 2.2 ug/m3. Allegheny County itself is the outlier. Broad regional improvement in PM levels was not observed in Allegheny County, and the likely cause is that emissions increased in the county."

"Allegheny County is just one of a few counties in the entire country receiving Fs in all three areas; daily and annual particulate pollution and ozone," added Rachel Filippini, executive director of the Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP). "These Fs represent a failure on the part of local leaders and regulators to prioritize air quality and treat it as the significant public health threat that it is. Our dirty air is linked to high asthma rates and elevated cancer risk and is negatively impacting both our residents' health and productivity."

"As EPA Administrator Pruitt and the current administration are rolling back environmental regulations," states Joseph Minott, Executive Director and Chief Counsel of Clean Air Council, "we are fearful that the Pittsburgh region may accelerate its race to the bottom in the next few years."

"The time has come for our elected leaders to address the longstanding issue of poor air quality in this region," added Michelle Naccarati-Chapkis for Women for a Health Environment. "Our children are suffering from higher rates of asthma and must be kept inside on ozone action days. It's imperative that communities come together to address air quality issues and work to empower those most affected and most vulnerable."

"These failing grades are unacceptable, especially in light of the expanding petrochemical industry that will only add to the pollution already in our region's air shed," said Terrie Baumgardner, a member of Beaver County Marcellus Awareness Community (BCMAC). "We must work to provide viable solutions – including clean energy alternatives – to improve the air and protect people, children and our grandchildren."

Federal cuts to EPA funding threatens to unwind many of these improvements. Because of the continuing need to improve its air quality rankings, Southwestern Pennsylvania residents have a particular interest in demanding that this regulatory framework be extended. ###

About the American Lung Association in Pennsylvania

The American Lung Association in Pennsylvania is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease, through research, education and advocacy. The work of the American Lung Association in Pennsylvania is focused on four strategic imperatives: to defeat lung cancer; to improve the air we breathe; to reduce the burden of lung disease on individuals and their families; and to eliminate tobacco use and tobacco-related diseases. Lung.org.

About the Breathe Project and Breathe Collaborative

Breathe Project is a clearinghouse for information on air quality in Pittsburgh, southwestern Pennsylvania and beyond. It uses the best available science and technology to better understand the quality of the air we breathe and provide opportunities for citizens to engage and take action. The Breathe Collaborative is a coalition of citizens, environmental advocates, public health professionals and academics working to improve air quality, eliminate climate pollution and make our region a healthy, prosperous place to live. The Breathe Collaborative powers the Breathe Project, its community outreach platform.

Updated Trend Charts and rankings for metropolitan areas and county grades are available at Lung.org/sota on April 18, 2018 at 12:01 a.m. EDT.