



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 21, 2020

Contact:

Debra Smit, Breathe Project, 412-760-7677

dsmit@breatheproject.com

American Lung Association Again Places Pittsburgh Metro Area as 8th Worst in Country for Year-Round Particle Pollution

Pittsburgh, PA – In a year that marks the 50th anniversary of the passage of the Clean Air Act, the creation of the U.S. EPA and Earth Day, the Pittsburgh region has failed to make significant progress in improving its air quality.

Despite efforts for half a century to clean up the Pittsburgh region's air, the Pittsburgh-New Castle-Weirton region still ranks in the top-10 worst regions in the country (8th overall) and retains the dubious distinction for being the only metropolitan region east of the Mississippi River to be ranked in the top 25 most polluted cities according to the latest "State of the Air" report released by the American Lung Association today.

If there is any good news in this report, it is that Pittsburgh was among three of the top-25 most polluted cities that had fewer unhealthy air days on average than in the 2019 report (Missoula, Mont., and Seattle, Wash., were the other two).

This ranking is also a very slight improvement for the metropolitan region, which moved from 7th worst in the 2019 report to 8th worst in the 2020 report, which uses data from the period of 2016 – 2018, the latest available data that is qualified by the U.S. EPA. 2018 was also a year of favorable meteorological conditions that likely explain at least some of the improvements from the prior year.

At the county level, Allegheny County ranked 16th worst in the country and continues get failing F-grades for all three measures of air pollution (annual particle, 24-hour particle, and annual ozone), a distinction it has held for at least the last five years. The current report is based on data for the years 2016-2018.

Environmental and public health advocates, as well as residents in the region, continue to seek solutions that give residents healthy, clean air to breathe. These advocates call upon on the region's leaders to continue to pressure companies that repeatedly violate their air permits and make our air dirtier.

“It is no surprise to residents of the Mon Valley that Allegheny County flunked the air quality test again,” said Edith Abeyta of North Braddock Residents for our Future. “Our lungs, hearts, brains, eyes and noses tell us every day about the public health failures around pollution control, here, in SWPA every minute, hour, day and year.”

“Garbage continues to be dumped on the poorest people and not even the Allegheny County Health Department is enforcing or standing up to the wrongs of industry,” says Melanie Meade, life-long Clairton resident. “It’s also distressing to learn that Trump suspended EPA rules which U.S. Steel has had little problem breaking. Our air will worsen thanks to these tactics and the lives of people living here will continue to decline.”

“The 2016 - 2018 report shows that the Pittsburgh metropolitan region has air that is rated ‘not good’ two-thirds of the time,” said Matt Mehalik, executive director of the Breathe Project. “An analysis of data from the Liberty monitor from 2016 - 2018 indicate measurements that rank worse than 97 percent of data from all monitors throughout the U.S. and exceeds the national and world health standards.

“Data from two other nearby monitors (Braddock, Parkway) exceed the world health standards and rank worse than 95 percent of all monitors in the U.S. County-wide, data from 9 monitors have been in the worst 20 percent of all monitors nationally, and the region has averaged only one monitor above the 50th percentile nationally. These facts are particularly concerning given the findings of a recent Harvard School of Public Health study, which appears to be the best available evidence regarding an association between air pollution and mortality from COVID-19.¹”

About the American Lung Association

The American Lung Association 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 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. *Learn more about Pittsburgh-New Castle-Weirton area rankings, as well as air quality across Pennsylvania and the nation, in the 2019 “State of the Air” report at [Lung.org/sota](https://www.lung.org/sota).*

About the Breathe Project

Breathe Project is a clearinghouse for information on air quality in Pittsburgh, southwestern Pennsylvania and beyond. We use 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. www.breatheproject.org

¹ “Exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States.” Xiao Wu, Rachel C. Nethery, Benjamin M. Sabath, Danielle Braun, Francesca Dominici. medRxiv 2020.04.05.20054502; doi: <https://doi.org/10.1101/2020.04.05.20054502>.