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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**American Lung Association's "2024 State of the Air" Shows 2 "F's" and a "D" with minor Air Quality Improvements Across the Region**

*Clean Air Advocates Point to the Closure of Outdated Fossil Fuel-Based Power Plants*

**PITTSBURGH, Pa.** – The American Lung Association's "2024 State of the Air " report released today charts incremental improvements in the region's air quality for the 12-county Pittsburgh-New Castle-Weirton, PA-OH-WV metro area while the region continues to struggle to overcome its reputation as one of the worst places in the U.S. to breathe.

Incremental improvements in our region's air quality are taking place due to the closure of several coal-fired power plants in our region, say air quality advocates. Cleaner air is the direct result of old, outdated plants closing including the Cheswick Power Station (2022) and the Bruce Mansfield Power Plant (2019), among others upwind in Ohio and West Virginia.

While these improvements found in the report are welcome news to air quality advocates, the metro region's worst county – Allegheny County, Pa. – continues to receive failing F grades for both long-term and short-term average levels of particle pollution, known as PM<sub>2.5</sub>. Annual average particle levels of 10.9 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m<sup>3</sup>) make our metro area the worst in the Mid-Atlantic region to breathe, according to the report – actually, the worst area east of Fargo, ND.

Particle pollution and ground-level ozone (known as smog) inflict serious health burdens on people, especially infants and children, seniors, people with cardiovascular disease, those living in poverty, pregnant people, people of color and those with respiratory diseases including asthma and cardiovascular damage.

In addition to the 2 F's for fine particles, the region's ozone grade has slipped as well, from a C to a D. There was also a smaller number of overall healthy days across the region.

"The root cause of all these air quality problems is our ongoing dependence on fossil fuels," said Matt Mehalik, Executive Director, Breathe Project. "We need to transition away from fossil fuels – in industry, transportation and residential uses – if we are to improve our health and address climate change."

Work remains to be done if Allegheny County is to meet the nation's new National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for fine particle pollution of 9.0  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , which will provide people with better public health protection, consistent with the available health science.

For decades, residents in the Mon Valley have been exposed to poor air quality because of ongoing pollution violations at U.S. Steel's Mon Valley Works Facilities. U.S. Steel has been fined more than \$19 million and forced equipment upgrades totaling more than \$37 million because of thousands of violations of the Clean Air Act since January of 2020 in Allegheny County. This "Pay to Pollute" way of doing business must stop if harm to the health of the Mon Valley residents is to end.

The concerns (and complaints) surrounding our region's historically poor air quality have been a source of serious environmental advocacy for decades. Residents in impacted communities and long-standing nonprofits continue fighting this pollution with the creation of technologies to capture data and report poor air days as well as rallies, marches and grassroots-led air quality town halls.

On February 7, 2024, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a final rule to strengthen the nation's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for fine particle pollution, also known as fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) or soot. Setting the level of the primary (health-based) annual PM<sub>2.5</sub> standard at 9.0  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  provides increased public health protection, consistent with the available health science.

The report also finds that in Beaver County, "the year-round measure of fine particle pollution posted its best result ever, 8.6  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , earning a passing mark according to the revised EPA standard, improving from last year's average of 8.9 micrograms per cubic meter." This is also largely due to the closures of old, outdated power plants in Ohio, West Virginia, and other midwestern states.

Note that the Shell Plastic Plant commenced operations in November 2022, which means that the air quality impact of this plant is not really captured in this year's report because it is based on 2020 – 2022 data.

The report also finds that the daily measure of fine particle pollution in Beaver County improved slightly although the region retained its "C" grade of the last two reports.

## **About the 2024 American Lung Association Report**

The “2024 State of the Air” report annually covers the two most widespread dangerous air pollutants in the nation – short and long-term particulates and ozone – but does not report on local levels of other pollutants – other criteria pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide, and carbon monoxide, or hazardous air pollutants such as benzene, toluene, xylenes, acid gases, etc. Many of these pollutants have been recorded at both the U.S. Steel plant in the Mon Valley and the Shell Plastic Plant.

See the full report results and sign the petition at [Lung.org/SOTA](https://lung.org/SOTA).

## **Comments from Air Quality Advocates**

### **Mayor Nickole Nesby, Environmental Justice Organizer, 412 Justice**

"It is time to hold polluters, elected officials and government entities accountable. We MATTER!" said Mayor Nickole Nesby, Environmental Justice Organizer for 412 Justice.

### **Karen Grzywinski, president of ACCAN**

"We've seen through retrospective studies on the Shenango Coke Works that the closure of highly polluting plants results in the improvement in air quality and has significant impacts on health outcomes," said Karen Grzywinski, president of Allegheny County Clean Air Now (ACCAN).

### **Hilary O'Toole, Executive Director, Beaver County Marcellus Awareness Community**

"The Beaver County Marcellus Awareness Community (BCMAC) remains gravely concerned about the health and wellness of all Pennsylvanians after reading the American Lung Association State of the Air Report 2024. We remain steadfast in holding polluters in southwest Pennsylvania accountable for compromising our clean air. And we will continue working to inform residents about the power they have to drive needed change, so we can all live safe, healthy lives in our home state of Pennsylvania."

### **Deborah Gentile, MD, Medical Director, Community Partners in Asthma Care**

"These results are disappointing but not surprising. Our region continues to lag behind on improving our air quality," said Dr. Deborah Gentile. "Our residents continue to suffer from premature death, heart disease, lung disease and other medical problems caused by unhealthy levels of air pollution in our region. It is past time our local leaders take action to clean up our air and protect the health of our residents."

### **Matt Walker, Advocacy Director, Clean Air Council**

"With increasing pollution from climate change, and more federal health-protective standards for fine particulate matter, today's report reflects the harsh reality of the state of our air in Pennsylvania - while seeing improvements in rankings for some measures, the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh metro areas are failing for year-round particle pollution," said Matt Walker, Clean Air Council Advocacy Director. "We have a lot of work to do to ensure everyone has a right to breathe clean air by holding industrial polluters accountable, advocating for clean energy and vehicles, and comprehensively tackling climate pollution from many aspects of our society."

### **Angela Kilbert, Senior Attorney, PennFuture**

“Allegheny County residents have suffered for far too long from the harmful effects of air pollution,” said Angela Kilbert, Senior Attorney at PennFuture. “This report shows there is much more work to be done on improving air quality in our region and holding industry polluters accountable.”

***About the Breathe Project***

*The Breathe Project is a coalition of citizens, environmental advocates, public health professionals and academics using the best available science and technology to improve air quality, eliminate climate pollution and make our region a healthy, prosperous place to live. Learn more at [www.breatheproject.org](http://www.breatheproject.org). Information about our Breathe Collaborative partners can be found [here](#).*