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American Lung Association's "2025 State of the Air" Lands the 13-County SWPA Region Back in the Top 25 Worst Places to Breathe in the U.S.

Residents, Organizations Respond to the Findings: The Region Ranked 16th Worst in the Country for Daily Particle Pollution, 12th Worst for Year-Round Particle Pollution due to Canadian Wildfires and Industrial Pollution

PITTSBURGH – The American Lung Association released its 2025 “State of the Air” report today, with the familiar news that Pittsburgh-Weirton-Steubenville, PA-OH-WV residents are still breathing some of the most polluted air in the country.

Despite incremental improvements in rankings last year for the SWPA region, primarily because it included the pandemic year of 2020 when overall air quality across the region improved, this year’s ranking puts our region back among the 25 worst places in the U.S. to breathe, with an “F” grade for daily particle pollution exposure and a “fail” grade for average annual average particle exposures over the years 2021 – 2023.

Poor air quality during this period was due to worsening air quality in 2023 and no longer including the pandemic year of 2020 in the three-year average. The region had over 25 days of overall poor air quality from particle pollution from industrial plants and other sources, said Kevin Stewart, Director, Environmental Health, of the American Lung Association.

The area again earned a D for ozone smog and placed 90th worst in the nation with 2.5 days per year. The ranking this year was an improvement over last year’s ranking when it was 50th worst with 2.7 days per year.

"The 2025 State of the Air Report confirms what people across Pennsylvania and this country have known for generations: dirty air is dangerous, and we need to do more to protect people," said Sean Hoffman, Legislative Director, Clean Air Action. "In the Keystone State, we have a Constitutional right to breathe clean air and Clean Air Action believes that should hold true for all Americans. We hope that this report encourages decision makers at every level of government to discourage large polluting industry development and pursue clean industry and energy projects going forward because we can, and should, have both the world's strongest economy and the world's cleanest air."

The Lung Association's 26th annual "State of the Air" report grades exposure to unhealthy levels of ground-level ozone air pollution (also known as smog), and year-round and short-term spikes in particle pollution, known as PM2.5 and soot, over the three-year period from 2021 to 2023.

Particle pollution and ground-level ozone (known as smog) inflict serious health burdens on people especially those with respiratory diseases, causing asthma, cardiovascular damage and respiratory diseases. Particulate particles come from wildfires, coal-powered power plants, diesel engines and wood-burning stoves.

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.

"We appreciate the work of the American Lung Association for producing this report every year. The findings help community members understand the ongoing risks to the health of people in our region," said Matt Mehalik, Executive Director, Breathe Project. "These findings emphasize the 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 micrograms per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$), which will provide people with better public health protection, consistent with the available health science.

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

In this year's "State of the Air" report, the Lung Association is calling on everyone to support the EPA, EPA staff and its life-saving programs. EPA is essential to protecting people's health from ozone and particle pollution. Without EPA staff and programs, families won't know what's in the air they are breathing, and efforts to clean up air pollution will be undone.

About the SOTA 2025 Report

The American Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through education, advocacy and research. The work of the American Lung Association is focused on four strategic imperatives: to defeat lung cancer; to champion clean air for all; to improve the quality of life for those with lung disease and their families; and to create a tobacco-free future.

NOTE: The “State of the Air” report covers the two most widespread dangerous air pollutants in the nation, 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 (HAPs) 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).

Information about our Breathe Collaborative partners can be found [here](#).