

Bakersfield, Fresno air among worst

By Mark Grossi

Fresno Bee, Wednesday, April 27, 2011

Bakersfield and Hanford are the only exceptions to a national trend of improving air quality among 25 cities with the worst soot and dust pollution.

The two cities are identified among the nation's worst-polluted places for both particle pollution and ozone in the annual American Lung Association "State of the Air" report, scheduled to be released today.

The health of 18.5 million people across America is in danger from air pollution, the report says. More than 3.8 million of these people are in the Valley.

For more than a decade, Valley air quality has been routinely graded as an "F" and ranked among the country's worst. The report this year shows little change, except that Bakersfield and Hanford seem to be getting worse while other polluted cities improve.

But the report exaggerates the particle pollution problem in the two cities, say officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The report does not explain that specks of pollution spiked in 2008 when thousands of wildfires filled the Valley with smoke and soot.

"If you exclude the wildfires, which we cannot control, we got more improvement than many places," said district executive direction Seyed Sadredin. "It's unfortunate because the whole trend is skewed by 2008."

The report is based on air-quality data from 2007, 2008 and 2009, the latest three years of information available. The association analyzed monitor readings and the daily air-quality index, which is a health-based air rating that considers such factors as temperature, moisture, wind and pollution levels.

Bakersfield, Fresno, Visalia and Hanford were among the 10 worst for ozone.

Bakersfield was ranked worst in the country for short-term particulate pollution – Fresno was second. For ozone, Bakersfield was second to the Los Angeles region, Visalia was third.

Lung Association officials said the air in most American cities is improving. They credited enforcement of the Clean Air Act resulting in tighter standards and more stringent rules over industries.

The improvements must continue to reduce heart and lung problems linked to air pollution, said Normal Edelman, the association's chief medical officer. Recent studies have shown particle pollution, in particular, is more dangerous than health officials have thought.

"Even among healthy adults, short-term exposure to high levels [of particle pollution] carries great risks," he said. "But they are especially dangerous for children' because children spend more time outside and are more active.

Although the association report does not fully explain the 2008 wildfire problem, local air official say people should read it. Fresno and Bakersfield had some of the best ozone improvement in the country, though both places still ran among the worst.

Worst for ozone

1. Los Angeles
2. Bakersfield
3. Visalia
4. Fresno
5. Sacramento
6. Hanford
7. San Diego
8. Houston
9. Merced
10. Charlotte, N.C.

Worst for short-term particle pollution

1. Bakersfield

- 2: Fresno
- 3: Pittsburgh
- 4: Los Angeles
- 5: Salt Lake City
6. Provo, Utah
7. Visalia
8. Birmingham, Ala.
9. Logan, Utah
10. Sacramento

American Lung Association Releases Annual Report on Air Quality

By American Lung Association in California

In the Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, April 27, 2011

LOS ANGELES, April 27, 2011 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The American Lung Association released the State of the Air 2011 today, an annual report on air quality which includes lists of both the cleanest and most polluted areas in the country. While the report indicates that California still has some of the worst air in the nation, it also shows continuous progress in reducing ozone and particulate pollution over the past ten years. The findings reinforce the effectiveness of California's stringent clean air laws and the importance of a strong Clean Air Act and a Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which have come under Congressional attack in recent weeks.

"Air pollution is a serious health threat to all Californians," said Jane Warner, President and CEO of the American Lung Association in California. "California has made tremendous improvements in the fight for clean air thanks to the work of the state's strong Air Resources Board and local Air Quality Management Districts but much still needs to be done. Cleaning up pollution results in healthier air. Now is not the time to stop progress."

More than 90 percent of Californians still live in counties plagued with unhealthy air, particularly in areas such as the Central Valley, Los Angeles, the Inland Empire, Sacramento, and San Diego. California cities once again dominate lists for the top ten most polluted areas in the nation for ozone (smog) and short-term and annual particle pollution. Specifically, of the top ten cities with the worst air pollution, California ranked as follows:

Ozone Pollution 8 out of the Top 10	Short-Term Particle Pollution 6 out of the Top 10	Annual Particle Pollution 6 out of the Top 10
#1 Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside	#1 Bakersfield-Delano	#1 Bakersfield-Delano
#2 Bakersfield –Delano	#2 Fresno-Madera	#2 Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside
#3 Visalia-Porterville	#4 Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside	#2 Visalia-Porterville
#4 Fresno- Madera	#7 Visalia-Porterville	#5 Hanford-Corcoran
#5 Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Yuba City	#9 Hanford-Corcoran	#6 Fresno-Madera
#6 Hanford-Corcoran	#9 Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Yuba City	#10 Modesto
#7 San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos		

#9 Merced

Despite these poor rankings, many of these cities continue to show improvements, including reductions in unhealthy days reported in all cities on the ozone list. The positive trends cited in the State of the Air 2011 report show that due in large part to California's advanced vehicle and fuel regulations, the Los Angeles metro area, San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento region, and San Diego have seen marked improvements in reducing air pollution. Beginning Wednesday, April 27, please visit www.lungusa.org/california to view these trend charts.

California's pollution problems are primarily driven by high emissions from cars, trucks, buses, fuels, diesel equipment, and other transportation sources. Oil refineries, manufacturing plants, and residential wood burning also are key sources of emissions. In addition, California's warm climate promotes the formation of ozone pollution, and valleys and mountains in the central and eastern portions of the state trap pollution where it can linger for days and put residents at risk for the onset of lung disease.

"Ozone and particle pollution levels today still contribute to thousands of hospitalizations, emergency room visits and early deaths every year. We know that air pollution can literally stunt children's lung development," said Dr. Sonal Patel, volunteer physician for the American Lung Association in California. "People suffering from asthma and other lung and heart diseases are particularly at risk. Sickness and deaths caused by air pollution not only represent personal tragedies, they also place a huge financial burden on our healthcare system. California needs cleaner air to save lives and prevent costly illnesses."

Even though so many people live in areas where bad air can make them sick, some members of Congress are proposing changes to the federal Clean Air Act that would interfere with efforts to reduce air pollution and protect public health. According to the EPA, the Clean Air Act saved more than 160,000 lives in 2010. Congressional attacks would undermine the Clean Air Act and strip California of its authority to adopt stronger clean car regulations.

"The American Lung Association in California continues to advocate for the Clean Air Act, strong clean air regulations and investment in programs whose aim is to reduce air pollution," said Warner. "We urge all Californians to voice support for the Clean Air Act and to make an effort to reduce air pollution in their communities by driving less, recycling, avoiding wood burning, and using energy efficient appliances."

To view a full copy of the State of the Air 2011 report, state and regional fact sheets, trend charts, and maps go to www.lungusa.org/california.

About the American Lung Association

Now in its second century, the American Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease. With your generous support, the American Lung Association is "Fighting for Air" through research, education and advocacy. For more information about the American Lung Association or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872) or visit www.lungusa.org/california.

Bakersfield again No. 1 for particle pollution

By Steven Mayer, Californian staff writer
Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, April 27, 2011

Bakersfield has in recent years seen some of the lowest levels of smog-producing ozone ever measured in the southern San Joaquin Valley, along with significant improvements in particle pollution.

But that progress didn't save Bakersfield from being ranked the most polluted city in the nation by the American Lung Association's 12th annual "State of the Air" report released today.

Valley air officials not associated with the lung association said the annual report is worth considering and lauded it for shining a light on a serious and stubborn public health problem. But in an email response to the report, officials with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District suggested the report makes

use of inadequate and disproportionate air pollution measurements and overlooks great improvements in the valley's air quality in recent years.

The lung association report, which examined data averaged from 2007 through 2009, focused on two measurements of particle pollution, a mostly wintertime problem, and one measurement of ozone, a summertime air pollutant.

Bakersfield was found to have the worst levels in the nation for short-term fine particulate matter -- mostly tiny dust and soot particles -- measured over a 24-hour period. The southern end of the valley also had the worst particle pollution problem measured as a year-round average.

But Bakersfield didn't quite reach the worst of the worst list in levels of ozone, which produces smog. The Los Angeles Basin had that unflattering distinction, with Bakersfield coming in second worst.

Bonnie Holmes-Gen, senior policy director for the American Lung Association of California, said there has been tremendous progress made across the state since the lung association published its first report. But more than half of Americans and more than 30 million Californians, she said, still live in areas that experience dangerous levels of air pollution at some time during the year.

The report illustrates that the challenges faced in the San Joaquin Valley are unmatched by other regions in California. It's well known that the valley's bowl-like topography and weather patterns trap pollutants low to the ground and cook up a soup of summer smog that can make the nearby mountains invisible.

"We understand your frustration," Holmes-Gen said of Bakersfield residents who feel they are in a game they can't win. "We believe the game can be won."

She said cleaning up emissions from diesel trucks, buses and farm equipment is one component of a multi-pronged solution. The need for more zero- and near zero-emission vehicles is another component.

One huge challenge is to get each one of us to re-examine our own contribution to the pollution problem, said the authors of the report. Do we drive unnecessary miles? Do we buy locally? Do we burn wood or waste electricity?

Local air district officials said because the report does not look beyond 2009, it overlooks the fact that the winters of 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 were the cleanest on record. In addition, more than 2,000 wildfires in the valley and areas ringing the valley in 2008 severely affected the valley's air quality, but that factor is not reflected in the report.

WORST POLLUTED AMERICAN CITIES

By smog-producing ozone

- 1: Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside
- 2: Bakersfield-Delano
- 3: Visalia-Porterville
- 4: Fresno-Madera
- 5: Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Yuba City

By year-round particle pollution

- 1: Bakersfield-Delano
- 2: Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside
- 3: Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, Ariz.
- 3: Visalia-Porterville
- 5: Hanford-Corcoran

By short-term particle pollution

- 1: Bakersfield-Delano
- 2: Fresno-Madera
- 3: Pittsburgh-New Castle, Penn.
- 4: Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside
- 5: Salt Lake City-Ogden-Clearfield, Utah

Source: American Lung Association

Tulare County air near worst in U.S. But experts credit emissions laws for some improvement

By David Castellon

Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, Wednesday, April 27, 2011

Tulare County and the Valley still have some of the unhealthiest air in the nation, according to a study released Tuesday by the American Lung Association.

The 177-page report states Tulare County is the fourth most ozone-polluted county in the nation, behind San Bernardino, Riverside and Kern counties.

Among major metropolitan areas, the Visalia-Tulare-Porterville area ranked slightly higher — third in the nation for ozone after Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside and Bakersfield-Delano metropolitan areas.

This is the Lung Association's 12th State of the Air report, ranking parts of the country on the healthiness of their air.

"The key for the American Lung Association in California is air pollution is making people sick, and it's cutting lives short," Jane Warner, president and chief executive officer of the Lung Association California, said in a telephone news conference Tuesday.

Paul Billings, vice president of national policy and advocacy for the association, said 154 million people in California live "where the air is dirty enough to send people to the emergency room, dirty enough to shape children's lungs and cause deaths."

Still, the experts provided by the Lung Association said California's air quality was improving, thanks to state and federal laws limiting industrial and vehicle emissions and efforts to get people to replace wood stoves with gas stoves.

The report looked at measurements of two primary air-pollution problems: particulates and ozone (smog).

Ozone can cause inflammation in people's airways, as well as headaches and nausea, said Dr. Praveen Buddiga, an asthma and allergy specialist at the Baz Allergy, Asthma and Sinus Center in Visalia.

It also can aggravate respiratory conditions, including asthma, chronic bronchitis and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

Particulates in the air can cause, among other problems, inflammation of the lungs, Buddiga said.

In the Valley, one in five children have asthma, and in Tulare and Kings counties, the average is closer to one in four, Buddiga said.

Based on year-round measurements of particulates in the air, the Lung Association ranked the Bakersfield-Delano metropolitan area as having the unhealthiest air, while the Visalia-Tulare-Porterville area tied for second with Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside and Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale, Ariz.

The Hanford-Corcoran and Fresno-Madera metropolitan areas ranked fifth and sixth, respectively.

In the county ranking for year-round particulates, Tulare County also tied for the second-worst air, along with Riverside County and Pinal County, Ariz. Kern County ranked first with Kings and Fresno counties taking the fifth and sixth rankings.

Tulare County, got an "F" in air quality from the Lung Association, as did the other Valley counties — Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, Stanislaus and San Joaquin.

While there is no doubt air quality is a major problem in the Valley because of weather and mountains that tend to trap the bad air here, Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, questioned whether the "F" for the counties here was merited.

He noted that one of the years the Lung Association used for its study was 2008, when California had about 3,000 wildfires — a third of them in the Valley.

And even those wildfires not in the Valley sent a lot of soot and ozone-generating gasses here, he said. "We think it's unfair to include 2008," he said.

Sadredin noted that the fires are likely the reason San Luis Obispo, which normally doesn't have much of an air-pollution problem because of its breezes, also got an "F," as did some other counties that normally get high marks.

"For those who understand the severity of air-quality challenges in the San Joaquin Valley, this anomaly is enough to totally dismiss the report and its scoring methodology," a press release from the air district states.

It goes on to say the Lung Association is looking at data a few years old and overlooks improvements to air quality here over the last couple of years.

"The last two winters were the cleanest winters on record [in the Valley], and last summer was the cleanest summer on record in a decade since we've been keeping data," Sadredin said.

State of Our Air

Read the American Lung Associations' 2011 State of the Air report online at www.lungusa.org/california.

Top 10 most ozone-polluted U.S. counties

1. San Bernardino
2. Riverside
3. Kern
4. Tulare
5. Los Angeles
6. Fresno
7. Sacramento
8. Kings
9. El Dorado
10. Nevada

Source: American Lung Association State of the Air 2011 report

L.A., Bakersfield remain among U.S.'s most polluted cities, report says

American Lung Assn. says smog and soot levels dropped significantly in Southern California over the last decade, but the L.A. area remains the worst region in the nation for ozone pollution.

By Margot Roosevelt, staff writer

L.A. Times, Wed., April 27, 2011

Smog and soot levels have dropped significantly in Southern California over the last decade, but the Los Angeles region still has the highest levels of ozone nationwide, violating federal health standards an average of 137 days a year.

The city ranks second in the country, behind Bakersfield, for the highest year-round levels of toxic particles or soot, and fourth in the nation for the number of short-term spikes in soot pollution.

The rankings, part of the annual "State of the Air" report by the American Lung Assn., are based on federal and state data, which show that more than 90% of Californians live in counties with unhealthy air.

Unlike parts of the East and Midwest, where coal-fired power plants are a primary source of toxic pollution, Southern California's chemical stew is the product of tailpipe emissions from cars and diesel pollution from trucks, trains and ships is linked to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. Oil refineries, manufacturing plants and residential wood burning also are significant contributors.

"There has been tremendous progress in California," said Jane Warner, president and chief executive of the association's California branch. But the level of air pollution in the state remains "a critical public health issue," she added. "It is not just a nuisance that burns your eyes or stings your throat."

Air pollution aggravates asthma, heart and lung disease and diabetes and can have a severe effect on children, stunting lung growth. Diesel emissions have been linked to cancer. According to the state Air Resources Board, 9,200 Californians die prematurely each year because of dirty air.

Over the last decade, the average number of high-ozone days has dropped 28% in the South Coast basin, which includes Orange County and the urban portions of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties. In the Central Valley, Bakersfield, Fresno and Sacramento also experienced their lowest ozone levels since the association's first report was published in 2000.

Nationally, 15 of the 25 most ozone-polluted metropolitan areas showed their lowest levels in a decade, and particle pollution dropped in 25 of the 27 most sooty cities.

Lung association officials acknowledged that some of the drop registered in this year's report, which averages results from 2007 through 2009, may be the result of the economic downturn. Southern California ports experienced a steep drop in tonnage in 2007 and 2008.

But Janice Nolen, the association's assistant vice president for national policy, noted that new emission-control equipment has been installed at power plants and new engine standards have been approved for diesel trucks, along with a program to replace the dirtiest diesel trucks with newer models. "With those changes, we expect much of the reductions in emissions are permanent," Nolen said.

Even with the recession, some areas grew more polluted. Bakersfield and Hanford each had worse average year-round soot levels in 2007-09 than in the previous three-year period. Truck and farm equipment emissions, along with winter wood-burning, were major factors, but severe wildfires, which blanketed the state with smoke from burning trees, also played a part.

If Southern California is ever to have consistently clean air, "we need to take dramatic new steps," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, the association's senior policy director in California. "At this point, anything that's easy has already been done.... We need to transition away from petroleum fuel to plug-in electric vehicles and redesign cities around public transit, biking and walking."

Nationally, the lung association said more than 154 million people — over half the population — live in areas with dirty air.

The report comes as Republicans in Congress are seeking sharp cuts in the Environmental Protection Agency budget; a rollback of proposed limits on mercury, arsenic and other toxic emissions from coal-fired power plants; and an easing of proposed rules to toughen ozone and soot standards.

"These are perilous times," said Charles D. Connor, president and chief executive of the association. "Despite tremendous gains, the Clean Air Act is under attack from the polluters lobby."

Under the George W. Bush administration, the EPA ignored its science advisors, setting health standards for ozone and particulates that were successfully challenged in court. The agency is expected to issue stricter standards this year that will throw even more cities and counties out of compliance, and increase pressure for further pollution controls.

Transportation study outlines Fresno County options

Business Journal (Fresno), Friday, April 22, 2011

After two years of planning, Fresno County has an official vision for transportation that will help reduce congestion and account for a population expected to exceed 1.5 million by 2035.

FastTrack Fresno County -- an association of the Fresno Council of Governments, 15 city members agencies, the county and two local transit agencies -- began work on the Public Transportation Infrastructure Study in 2008. The study evaluates commuter trends and land use patterns that government officials can use to make decisions in terms of new development, modes of travel and air quality improvements.

With an aggressive transit-oriented development plan, the study found that 52% of new growth would be centered in populated transit corridors as opposed to 38% under current strategies. In addition, the same scenarios are estimated to result in greenhouse gas reductions of 8% and 0.4% respectively.

The study also includes tables comparing the popularity of different methods of travel expected under each scenario. A full transit-oriented development buildout, for instance, would result in 45% more people using public transit by 2035 compared to the status quo.

The study has several recommendations to policy makers to handle growth, including locating half of all new households and employment in downtown Fresno and in close proximity to the high-capacity transit corridors of Blackstone, Ventura/Kings Canyon and Shaw avenues.

Form-based codes, or regulating development to achieve a specific urban form, is urged to centralize development in certain areas, while specifying building heights ranging from three to six stories in another options that could restrict urban sprawl and reduce vehicle miles, as stated in the study.

Pursuing funding for more efficient Bus Rapid Transit infrastructure was also suggested as is research into light rail and Personal Rapid Transit pods that could carry commuters individually throughout the city. The study also looks at expanding the county's vanpool program for workers and its Valley Ride carpool matching database and adding an express commuter service along Highway 99 from Kingsburg, Selma and Fowler.