

Bakersfield Californian Editorial, Wed., April 24, 2013

Last-place air, sure, but we're getting better

Stop us if you're heard this one before. Bakersfield's air is the worst in the nation. That's the not-so-shocking verdict of the American Lung Association, which announced Tuesday that the Bakersfield-Delano metro area is ranked first -- as in worst -- for short-term particle pollution and annual particle pollution in the U.S., and third in ozone pollution, based on 2009-11 EPA data. Kern County received an overall F grade, along with every other San Joaquin Valley county except one.

It's important to understand, however, that for the most part Bakersfield is a horrible place to breathe only in a relative sense. During the most recent evaluation period, Kern County had the fewest unhealthy ozone days in any two-year period since the annual report has been issued. Kern also had 10 fewer unhealthy particulate days than in last year's report.

In other words, Bakersfield and Kern County have improved, but so has everyone else. And that's good, even if it hasn't done a thing for this area's effort to get out of the air-quality cellar.

The advances may be due to any number of factors beyond human control, but active efforts to improve our air undertaken by local and regional leaders have almost certainly been the most important element.

What more can we do? A few things, surely. The real question is what are we willing to do? A safer, more efficient bicycle commuting grid is one possibility. Minimizing car-idling time is another. And encouraging our state and federal lawmakers to support the development of clean energy and tough engine emission standards is still another. Because of its geographic and geological circumstances, Kern County will never be San Diego in terms of air quality, but that doesn't mean we should entirely resign ourselves to poor breathability scores.

Valley flunks air test

But report from Lung Association sees improvement

By Alex Breitler

Stockton Record, Wednesday, April 24, 2013

One major air pollutant got better and one got worse, but both are still worthy of an "F" grade in the eyes of the American Lung Association.

The association's annual State of the Air report, released today, shows considerable improvement for San Joaquin County in the number of days considered hazardous for summertime ozone pollution.

Tiny particulate matter, however - a serious health hazard during the wintertime wood-burning season - got worse. The report considers the years 2009 through 2011.

By the numbers

San Joaquin County

Ozone pollution: 19 orange days, one red day, no purple days. Grade: F

Particle pollution: 27 orange days 5 red days no purple days. Grade: F

Calaveras County

Ozone pollution: 19 "orange" days, no "red" or "purple" days. Grade: F

Particle pollution: No orange, red or purple days. Grade: A

Orange means unhealthy for sensitive groups; red means unhealthy; purple means very unhealthy.

San Joaquin County routinely fails the lung association's examinations, irking some air quality officials who believe big-picture progress is not reflected in the snapshot critique.

An "F", in fact, is the most common grade awarded by the association, lumping San Joaquin with much dirtier counties in the south San Joaquin Valley, and with generally cleaner counties such as Calaveras.

But despite the negative grades, association officials took a more optimistic tone with the latest version of the report.

"We are making progress every year, and this report in particular demonstrates that," said Jane Warner, president of the lung association's California branch.

Warner noted that California cities considered among the nation's top 25 with regard to ozone pollution saw the fewest number of unhealthy days since the annual reports started 14 years ago.

Indeed, Stockton - which last year ranked 23rd for ozone - dropped out of the top 25 altogether. On the other hand, Stockton remained on the list for particle pollution, ranking 12th.

"Air quality has improved significantly in California over the years of the State of the Air report, and that's been exciting to see. However, it does continue to be a health hazard, making people sick and cutting lives short," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, the association's director of policy and advocacy.

Air quality management officials put out their own report last week, emphasizing the positive trends. Overall, pollution in the San Joaquin Valley has declined 80 percent, said Seyed Sadredin, head of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

Some describe the lung association's report as too narrow.

"We get a kick out of (the report)," Sadredin said last week.

"Every year we get the same grade as pristine areas - an F. That's somewhat indicative of the fact you need to take a more in-depth look at air quality statistics rather than the simplistic approach the (lung association) uses."

The lung association's report ranks San Joaquin as the 15th dirtiest county in terms of particle pollution on the latest list, up from 20th last year.

The data show the particle problem persisting up and down the Valley.

Merced ranks high for pollution, but air district takes issue with report

By Erika Bolstad

Merced Sun-Star Washington Bureau, April 24, 2013

WASHINGTON -- California cities, including Merced, Modesto and Fresno, continue to have some of the worst air in the United States, according to the American Lung Association's "State of the Air 2013" report.

The annual report, which tracks air pollution across the country, ranked Bakersfield as the sootiest city in the country, followed by Merced and Fresno. Modesto was No. 6. Many California cities also ranked high in ozone pollution, particularly in the summer.

Air pollution remains a pervasive public health threat across the United States, said Harold Wimmer, national president and chief executive officer of the American Lung Association.

More than 131.8 million Americans, about 42 percent of the population, live in counties that have unhealthy levels of ozone or particle pollution, the report found.

However, Jaime Holt, chief communications officer for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, said ranking Merced at the top of the list for particle pollution isn't accurate and was based on partial data.

"Merced is not the worst offender," she said, adding that the monitor from which the data were taken was operational for only part of the year -- in the winter when the worst particulate matter is recorded. It didn't include months with cleaner air.

"It was just a small snapshot of the year," Holt said.

She said she thought the American Lung Association should have included an explanation in its report.

The air quality isn't the best in the Merced area, Holt said, but it's far better than what was presented in the American Lung Association's report.

"We don't have pristine air quality -- we understand that," she said. "It's a really complex issue here in the valley."

Most of the particle pollution comes from cars, diesel trucks and residential wood burning.

Holt said businesses and industry have invested about \$40 billion toward cleaning up the air. That investment has led to an 80 percent reduction in pollution from those sources over the past 20 years.

Merced Mayor Stan Thurston said much of the local pollution blows in from the Bay Area and settles in the valley because of its bowl shape.

Local leaders encourage healthy living that promotes a cleaner environment, such as riding bicycles, but major improvements in air quality often come from advancements in some of the more notorious polluters, Thurston said.

Diesel trucks and farm equipment have gotten more efficient through the years, resulting in less pollution, he noted.

The American Lung Association's report also shows that air quality nationwide continues in a long-term trend toward much healthier air.

"Even in parts of the country that experienced increases in unhealthy days of high ozone and short-term particle pollution, they still have better air quality compared to a decade ago," Wimmer said in a statement.

The report found that compared with last year, many places made strong progress in lower year-round levels of particle pollution.

The report suggests that's a direct result of transitioning to cleaner diesel fuels and engines and reduced emissions from coal-fired power plants, especially in the eastern United States.

The association will urge the Obama administration to take action in the next year, including establishing standards to reduce tailpipe and smokestack pollution.

The American Lung Association report came out the same day the California Environmental Protection Agency released the nation's first comprehensive statewide environmental health screening tool.

Known as CalEnviroScreen 1.0, the tool allows people to see how much pollution they have in their communities and who is most vulnerable to its effects.

The tool uses data from about 11 types of pollution and environmental factors and seven population characteristics and socioeconomic factors to create scores for each ZIP code in California.

The agency says it will help state decision-makers figure out which communities need target grants, investments, cleanup efforts and enforcement actions, particularly in the state's most disadvantaged communities.

Bakersfield pollution again ranked nation's worst

By Rachel Cook

Bakersfield Californian, Wednesday, April 24, 2013

American Lung Association executives delivered perennial bad news Tuesday but with a dose of encouragement: Bakersfield and the San Joaquin Valley still have some of the nation's worst air quality, but there are points of improvement.

Bakersfield-Delano ranked first in the nation for short-term and annual particle pollution, and third in ozone pollution in the Lung Association's "State of the Air 2013" report.

Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside had the worst ozone problem in the country, according to the association.

Kern and the seven other counties in the San Joaquin Valley overwhelmingly received Fs on air quality indicators graded by the report, which crunched Environmental Protection Agency data from 2009 to 2011.

San Joaquin County earned the valley's only "pass" grade.

But a report fact sheet noted that six of the counties, including Kern, Tulare and Fresno, had "their fewest ever" unhealthy ozone days. Bakersfield's unhealthy ozone days have dropped 44 percent since from the Lung Association's 1996-1998 data.

Also on the bright side, Kern County had 10 fewer unhealthy particulate days than in last year's report, according to a fact sheet from the Lung Association.

But although the valley has seen a reduction in year-round levels of particle pollution, short-term levels are still problematic, Lung Association officials said.

Short-term particle pollution refers to spikes in pollution inhaled over just a few hours or days and "these represent levels averaged over a 24-hour period," according to the Lung Association.

"All of that shows us that there still is a big concern here and a need to really focus our efforts," said Bonnie Holmes-Gen, senior director of policy and advocacy for the Lung Association in California.

The valley presents particular challenges, including stagnant weather, that make it likely the "most challenging area in the country" in terms of air quality, Holmes-Gen said.

The easy steps to reduce pollution have already been taken and lowering levels further will require "drastically" ratcheting down vehicle emissions, she said.

"There is hope but we need to sustain the efforts to move toward the cleanest possible technologies," Holmes-Gen said.

In a conference call on the report's results, Lung Association administrators praised California for being a leader in clean air efforts.

They simultaneously hammered their point that more needs to be done to improve air quality, including reducing diesel emissions and promoting cleaner vehicles and fuel.

The California Air Pollution Control Officers' Association released its own report on the state's air quality last week.

That report highlighted overall air quality improvements and noted that Kern County and several other counties achieved the eight-hour federal ozone standard last year.

VALLEY RANKINGS

How valley cities fall among nation's most polluted metropolitan areas

Metro Area	Ozone	Short-term Particulates	Annual Particulates
Bakersfield	3	1	1 (tie)
Fresno	4	2	3
Hanford	5	3	4
Merced	11	8	1 (tie)
Modesto	13	5	6
Visalia	2	14	7

Source: American Lung Association, State of the Air 2013

Air in San Joaquin Valley Cities Among Nation's Dirtiest

By Erika Bolstad, McClatchy Newspapers

In the Fresno Bee, Modesto Bee, Tuesday, April 24, 2013

WASHINGTON -- California cities, including Modesto, Fresno and Merced, continue to have some of the worst air in the United States, according to the American Lung Association's "State of the Air 2013" report.

The annual report, which tracks air pollution across the country, ranked Bakersfield as the sootiest city in the country, followed by Merced and Fresno. Modesto was No. 6. Many California cities also ranked high in ozone pollution, particularly in the summer.

The Lung Association report had few surprises for the San Joaquin Valley Air District, said Jaime Holt, a spokeswoman for the public health agency charged with implementing air quality-management strategies for the region.

But Holt also said that the report failed to take into account how far many of their communities have come. There's been almost \$40 billion in investment by industry to improve air quality in recent years, she said, and residents must abide by strict guidelines for both indoor and outdoor fireplaces.

"It's a top quality of life issue for the people in the valley," Holt said. "We get we have a long way to go."

Air pollution remains a pervasive public health threat across the United States, said Harold Wimmer, national president and CEO of the American Lung Association. More than 131.8 million Americans – about 42 percent of the population – live in counties that have unhealthy levels of either ozone or particle pollution, the report found.

Yet the group's report also shows that air quality nationwide continues in a long-term trend to much healthier air.

"Even in parts of the country that experienced increases in unhealthy days of high ozone and short-term particle pollution, they still have better air quality compared to a decade ago," Wimmer said in a statement.

The report found that compared with last year, many places made strong progress in lower year-round levels of particle pollution. The report suggests that's a direct result of transitioning to cleaner diesel fuels and engines and reduced emissions from coal-fired power plants, especially in the eastern United States.

The association will urge the Obama administration to take action in the next year, including establishing standards to reduce tailpipe and smokestack pollution.

The Lung Association report came out the same day that the California Environmental Protection Agency released the nation's first comprehensive statewide environmental health screening tool. Known as CalEnviroScreen 1.0, the tool allows people to see how much pollution they have in their communities and who is most vulnerable to its effects.

The tool uses data from about 11 types of pollution and environmental factors and seven population characteristics and socioeconomic factors to create scores for each ZIP code in California. The agency says it will help state decision-makers figure out which communities need target grants, investments, cleanup efforts and enforcement actions, particularly in the state's most disadvantaged communities.

American Lung Association Releases 2013 Report on Air Quality **14th annual State of the Air 2013 report shows tremendous progress; challenges**

By American Lung Association in California
Sacramento Bee, Wednesday, April 24, 2013

Los Angeles - This morning, the American Lung Association released State of the Air 2013, an annual report on air quality which lists both the cleanest and most polluted areas in the country. This year's report shows significant progress in efforts to reduce ozone and particulate pollution, with air quality in many areas of California at its cleanest since the Lung Association's annual report began 14 years ago. The findings reinforce the effectiveness of the state's strong clean air laws and progressive initiatives including incentive programs that help reduce diesel emissions and promote cleaner vehicles and fuels.

"The State of the Air 2013 report shows that California is continuing the long-term trend to cleaner and much healthier air," said Jane Warner, President and CEO of the American Lung Association in California. "This progress in cleaning up air pollution demonstrates that our clean air laws are working. However, our report also shows that air pollution continues to put lives at risk throughout the state. We must step up our efforts to cut pollution so all Californians can breathe clean, healthy air. "

Nearly ninety percent of Californians still live in counties plagued with unhealthy air, particularly in the San Joaquin Valley, Los Angeles, Inland Empire, and Sacramento. That means people are at greater risk for

asthma attacks, heart attacks, and premature death. Although many counties show lower levels of air pollution compared to last year's report, California cities still dominate lists of the most polluted areas in the nation for ozone (smog) as well as short-term and annual particle pollution. Specifically, of the top ten cities with the worst air pollution, California municipalities rank as follows:

Despite these rankings, many California cities continue to show significant improvements in reducing unhealthy ozone and particulate pollution. California's slow yet steady progress toward healthy air can be attributed to its strong history of leadership on air and climate policies, including the leadership of Governor Jerry Brown. Governor Brown's work to champion zero emission vehicle and clean fuel policies, including the ZEV Action Plan and California's alternative fuels standard (Low Carbon Fuel Standard), is moving California forward to cleaner air and bringing more transportation choices.

The Los Angeles region in particular shows noteworthy success in reducing both ozone and particulate pollution over the 14 years of the State of the Air report. Ozone levels in the region have fallen by 36 percent since the first State of the Air report in 2000, with unhealthy ozone days dropping from 190 to 122 days during that time period. Annual levels of particle pollution have also dropped by 43 percent, and short term levels dropped by two-thirds, despite recent fluctuations. The Los Angeles region now is very close to meeting the federal annual particle pollution standard. Dramatic reductions in ozone and particle pollution have also occurred in the San Francisco Bay Area. While the San Joaquin Valley still struggles with particle pollution, most parts of the Valley have seen marked reductions in ozone pollution.

California's pollution problems are primarily caused by emissions from transportation sources including cars, diesel trucks and buses, locomotives, ships, agricultural and construction equipment. Currently, the American Lung Association in California is sponsoring Senate Bill 11 (Pavley) and Assembly Bill 8 (Perea and Skinner), two bills that will help clean the air and improve public health by extending two highly successful California air quality incentive programs for another decade and raising over \$200 million in incentive funds annually. These programs support the transition to cleaner vehicles and the clean alternative fuels needed to meet state clean air and climate targets and provide near-term benefits by cutting toxic diesel pollution. These programs are an important complement to the state's regulatory framework because they provide financial incentives for early introduction of clean vehicles and technologies.

Air pollution problems also are caused by emissions from oil refineries, manufacturing plants, and residential wood burning. 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 or exacerbation of lung disease.

"Ozone and particle pollution contribute to thousands of hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and deaths every year and our most vulnerable citizens are most at risk – children, the elderly and those with lung disease such as asthma, lung cancer, chronic bronchitis, or emphysema," said David Tom Cooke, M.D., Assistant Professor, Section Head of General Thoracic Surgery, Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery, University of California, Davis Medical Center and Governing Board Member for the American Lung Association in California. "Cleaner air saves lives, and can lead to better health and quality of life for everyone."

The Lung Association led the fight for a new, national air quality standard that strengthened outdated limits on annual levels of particle pollution, announced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) last December. Now the Lung Association is fighting for a strong national clean car standard and defending the Federal Clean Air Act, our nation's bedrock clean air law. Thanks to national air pollution standards set under the Clean Air Act and the EPA enforcement of these standards, as well as California's own groundbreaking air quality policies, the U.S. has seen continued reductions in air pollution.

"California must continue to demonstrate leadership in achieving clean and healthy air for all residents," said Warner. "This can be done by supporting statewide initiatives such as Senate Bill 11 and Assembly Bill 8, and by making an effort to reduce air pollution in our own communities. Driving less, using cleaner transportation options like hybrid cars and electric vehicles, and avoiding wood burning, can make a huge difference in improving the air we breathe." For more information on the American Lung Association State of the Air Report and a list of steps individuals can take to clean the air, the public should visit www.lung.org/california.

Tool identifies California's most polluted cities

By Tracie Cone, Associated Press

Contra Costa Times, Tuesday, April 23, 2013

SACRAMENTO -- Seven of California's 10 ZIP codes most burdened by pollution are in the San Joaquin Valley and three are in Los Angeles, according to a new tool developed by state environmental officials to target communities for cleanup.

"People tend to think of more urban areas when they think of pollution effects," said Sam Delson, a spokesman for the California Environmental Protection Agency. "That isn't necessarily the case."

Delson said the most immediate outcome for some of the communities might be investments and grants from the state's cap-and-trade fund, where 25 percent of the money is supposed to be earmarked to improve the worst pockets of pollution.

The study of 1,769 ZIP code areas by the Cal EPA looked at everything from pesticide use to traffic density to groundwater threats. It scored the environmental hazards in each community then added in human health factors such as the number of children and elderly in the area, the birth weights of infants, asthma rates and poverty levels.

The resulting CalEnviroScreen released Tuesday on the Cal EPA's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment website is a tool that can be used by planners to identify communities most burdened by pollution and to direct cleanup funding to them.

"This at least gives some idea of what the impacts are on the communities that are overburdened," said Caroline Farrell, executive director of the Delano-based Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment. "Once you identify them you can make improvements."

While there have been previous attempts to look at individual types of pollution, Delson said this is believed to be the first to consider cumulative impacts on the vulnerable populations of people who live there, especially vulnerable populations of the very young and the very old.

The top 10 cities include three ZIP codes in Stockton, three in Fresno and one in Bakersfield. In Southern California, East Los Angeles, Vernon, and Baldwin Park are also in the top 10.

Dozens of other cities in the San Joaquin Valley, Inland Empire of Southern California and pockets of industrialized areas around the San Francisco Bay were among the 10 percent of the state ZIP codes that scored highest in potential impacts on people who live there.

The study looked at 11 types of pollution in each ZIP code, including pesticides, particulate pollution, ozone and diesel emissions, and seven socioeconomic factors.

The study is the most comprehensive to date on pollution and its impacts on vulnerable populations and communities with high poverty. It comes out of a 2004 mandate by Cal EPA to consider environmental justice when making cleanup and permitting decisions.

"This is all data that is publicly available, but it has never been assembled and combined in an analytical way," Delson said.

The League of California Cities initially balked at the idea of the study, thinking results would stymie development in blighted areas. In response Cal EPA stressed in the final version that the study was not intended to substitute for local environmental assessments for development.

Also agriculture interests complained that the presence of pesticides in a community does not correlate to exposure levels, a point Cal EPA concedes. The agency said the assessments of pesticides in communities will be updated as more data becomes available in the coming years.