

CONTACT: Mary Havell
MHavell@lungusa.org
(202) 715-3459

American Lung Association Releases Lists of the Nation's Most Polluted Cities in Annual State of the Air Report

Report Shows Positive Nationwide Trends in Cleanup of Deadly Air Pollution Still, Half the Nation Has Unhealthy Levels of Air Pollution

Editors' Note: *Multimedia toolkit including broadcast quality b-roll and photographs are available at www.stateoftheair.com. Trend charts and rankings for metropolitan areas and county grades are available at www.stateoftheair.org.*

[Embargoed Until: 5 a.m. (EDT), April 27, 2011] Today, the American Lung Association released its annual report on air quality, *State of the Air 2011*, which includes lists of the nation's most polluted metropolitan areas. This year's report finds that the majority of American cities most-polluted by ozone (smog) or year-round particle pollution (soot) have improved, showing continued progress in the cleanup of deadly toxics, thanks to the Clean Air Act. Though progress has been made, some members of Congress are working to weaken the Clean Air Act and public health protection it provides. The Lung Association's annual air quality report, available at www.stateoftheair.org, reveals that just over half the nation—154.5 million people—live in areas with levels of ozone and/or particle pollution that are often dangerous to breathe. *State of the Air 2011* finds the Clean Air Act is working. All metro areas in the list of the 25 cities most polluted by ozone showed improvement over the previous report, and 15 of those cities experienced the best year yet. All but two of the 25 cities most polluted with year-round particle pollution improved over last year's report. However, only 11 cities among those most polluted by short-term spikes in

particle pollution experienced improvement. “*State of the Air* tells us that the progress the nation has made cleaning up coal-fired power plants, diesel emissions and other pollution sources has drastically cut dangerous pollution from the air we breathe,” said Charles D. Connor, American Lung Association President and CEO. “We owe our cleaner air to the Clean Air Act. We have proof that cleaning up pollution results in healthier air to breathe. That’s why we cannot stop now. Half of our nation is still breathing dangerously polluted air. Everyone must be protected from air pollution.” The *State of the Air 2011* report grades cities and counties based, in part, on the color-coded Air Quality Index developed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help alert the public to daily unhealthy air conditions. The 12th annual release of the Lung Association’s report uses the most recent EPA data collected from 2007 through 2009 from official monitors for ozone and particle pollution, the two most widespread types of air pollution. Counties are graded for ozone, year-round particle pollution and short-term particle pollution levels. The report also uses EPA’s calculations for year-round particle levels. The report identified Honolulu, Hawaii and Santa Fe-Espanola, N.M. as the cleanest cities—the only two cities in the nation that were among the cleanest for year-round particle pollution and also had no days when ozone and daily particle pollution levels reached unhealthy ranges.

One in Five Americans Breathe Dangerous Levels of Deadly Particle Air Pollution Nearly 60 million Americans (19.8 percent) live in counties with too many unhealthy spikes in particle pollution levels, and 18 million people live with unhealthy year-round levels of particle pollution. Particle levels can spike dangerously for hours to weeks on end (short-term) or remain at unhealthy levels on average every day (year-round). “Particle pollution kills,” said Norman H. Edelman, M.D., American Lung Association Chief Medical Officer. “When you breathe these microscopic particles, you are inhaling a noxious mix of chemicals, metals, acid aerosols, ash and soot that is emitted from smokestacks, tailpipes, and other sources. It is as toxic as it sounds and can lead to early death, asthma exacerbations, heart attacks, strokes and emergency room visits in substantial numbers. Science clearly has proven that we need to protect the health of the public from the dangers of particle pollution.” Only 10 counties received an “F” for year-round particle pollution, a reflection of progress made under the Clean Air Act. Bakersfield, Calif. tops both lists of cities most-polluted by short-term and annual particle pollution. Bakersfield and Hanford, Calif. were the only two cities where year-round particle levels worsened over the previous report.

Nearly Half of Nation Lives in Areas that Scored "F" for Smog *State of the Air 2011* finds that nearly half the people in the U.S. (48.2 percent) live in counties that received an "F" for air quality due to unhealthy ozone levels. Ozone (smog) is the most widespread air pollutant, created by the reaction of sunlight on emissions from vehicles, power plants and other sources. When ozone is inhaled, it irritates the lungs. It can cause immediate health problems and continue days later. Ozone can cause wheezing, coughing, asthma attacks and even premature death. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside, Calif. remains the metropolitan area with the worst ozone problem, although great improvements have been made since the report was first issued.

Congress Threatens to Weaken Federal Law Despite Americans' Support for Stronger Controls Some members of Congress are proposing to weaken or block enforcement of the Clean Air Act, including steps to strip legal authority and funding from the EPA. Such moves would undermine the cleanup that remains, including the long-overdue cleanup of power plants EPA recently proposed. As the Lung Association pointed out in its March report on [toxic air pollution from coal-fired power plants](#), the pollution from over 440 coal-fired power plants in 46 states are among the biggest contributors to ozone and particle pollution in the U.S. In addition, these plants produce 84 known hazardous air pollutants like arsenic, mercury, dioxins, formaldehyde and hydrogen chloride, which blow across state lines polluting the air thousands of miles away from the plants. Since this pollution spreads across state lines, the EPA's ability to enforce standards is the only protection many communities have. The American Lung Association released a [bipartisan poll](#) in February that showed Americans overwhelmingly support efforts for even tougher air quality standards, and oppose Congressional action that interferes with the EPA's ability to update clean air standards. "Some in Congress are working to weaken the Clean Air Act and care more about protecting the interests of industry polluters than the health of Americans," said Connor. A bipartisan Congress passed the Clean Air Act more than 40 years ago and has twice strengthened it to protect public health. The Clean Air Act saved more than 160,000 lives in 2010, according to EPA's data. "Very few of us can avoid dangerous air pollution and unfortunately the heaviest burden often falls on those who are least able to bear it. These are the same people Congress and Administrations of both parties have promised to protect. The American Lung Association is committed to keeping the law strong to protect public health, including our children and our elderly and people who suffer from lung disease." The American Lung Association urges the public to voice support

for the EPA to continue to protect the air in every community by visiting www.lungaction.org and to learn how their communities rank in *State of the Air 2011* by visiting www.stateoftheair.org. For the first time, people can compare the findings for different metropolitan areas online.

Nation's Most Polluted Cities:

10 Most Ozone-Polluted Cities

1. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside, Calif.
2. Bakersfield-Delano, Calif.
3. Visalia-Porterville, Calif.
4. Fresno-Madera, Calif.
5. Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Yuba City, Calif.-Nev.
6. Hanford-Corcoran, Calif.
7. San Diego-Carlsbad-San Marcos, Calif.
8. Houston-Baytown-Huntsville, Texas
9. Merced, Calif.
10. Charlotte-Gastonia-Salisbury, N.C.-S.C.

10 Cities Most Polluted by Short-term Particle Pollution

1. Bakersfield-Delano, Calif.
2. Fresno-Madera, Calif.
3. Pittsburgh-New Castle, Pa.
4. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside, Calif.
5. Salt Lake City-Ogden-Clearfield, Utah
6. Provo-Orem, Utah
7. Visalia-Porterville, Calif.
8. Birmingham-Hoover-Cullman, Ala.
9. Hanford-Corcoran, Calif.
9. Logan, Utah-Idaho
9. Sacramento-Arden-Arcade-Yuba City, Calif.-Nev.

10 Cities Most Polluted by Year-Round Particle Pollution

1. Bakersfield-Delano, Calif.
2. Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside, Calif.
2. Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale, Ariz.
2. Visalia-Porterville, Calif.
5. Hanford-Corcoran, Calif.
6. Fresno-Madera, Calif.
7. Pittsburgh-New Castle, Pa.

8. Birmingham-Hoover-Cullman, Ala.
9. Cincinnati-Middletown-Wilmington, Ohio-Ky.-Ind.
10. Louisville-Jefferson County-Elizabethtown-Scottsburg, Ky.-Ind.
10. Modesto, Calif.

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, a Charity Navigator Four Star Charity and holder of the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Guide Seal, or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872) or visit www.LungUSA.org.

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