

Bakersfield again rated poor for air quality, locals highlight improvements

By Sue Manning, Associated Press

In the Bakersfield Californian Wed., April 27, 2011

Bakersfield again came in first and second worst in the nation for certain types of air pollution in the American Lung Association's latest annual report, out Wednesday, but local officials say we've made significant air improvements and some of the report's data is old.

The report said six in 10 Americans -- about 175 million people -- are living in places where air pollution often reaches dangerous levels, despite progress in reducing particle pollution.

The Los Angeles area had the nation's worst ozone pollution. Bakersfield had the second worst.

The report examined fine particulate matter over 24-hour periods and as a year-round average, Bakersfield had the worst short-term particle pollution, and the Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale area of Arizona had the worst year-round particle pollution. The U.S. cities with the cleanest air were Fargo, N.D., Wahpeton, N.D., and Lincoln, Neb.

The report is accurate but doesn't show how far California has come, said Dimitri Stanich, a spokesman for the California Air Resources Board.

"More than 45 percent of the days in the 1990 ozone season were considered very unhealthy (in the South Coast area). Today, 45 percent of the days are clean, more than double the number of clean days during 1990."

"So while we are still not meeting the federal air quality standards, the concentrations that Californians are exposed to are coming down dramatically," he said.

The report's latest data is from 2006-2008 -- the most recent information approved by the feds -- and so doesn't tell the most accurate, recent story, said Jaime Holt, chief communications officer for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District in Fresno, which oversees the Bakersfield area.

We had unusually poor air quality the summer of 2008 due to wildfires, which skews the local picture, and excellent air quality by our standards during the summer and winter of 2009, she said.

The valley was 80 percent above the standard for fine particulate pollution called PM 2.5 over the course of a year in 1999, compared to 30 percent in 2008, Holt said as one example of progress.

"We are one of the dirtiest places in the nation, and we recognize that, but we are much cleaner than we used to be and we wish that side of the coin had been mentioned," she said.

The report gave Bakersfield an "F" grade -- again.

"If you are a student who was getting 10 percent on tests every year and you improved to 50 percent on tests every year, you are still failing, but you've made tremendous improvements," Holt said. But if the instructor keeps yelling that you are failing, it doesn't inspire you to keep doing the work it took to get from 10 percent to 50 percent, she said.

In Arizona, Benjamin H. Grumbles, the state's environmental quality director, issued a statement objecting to the methodology of the report highlighting the Phoenix area's levels of particulates such as dust.

"This finding came about because of one lonely air quality monitor near the cowtown area of western Pinal County, nearly 40 miles and across the mountains from downtown Phoenix," he said. He also called the report, based on 2006-08 figures, outdated, saying pollution levels have improved since then.

He said the state recognizes that the Phoenix area has significant air pollution problems, and "we're making some progress on dust and ozone in the Phoenix area, but not enough and not as quickly as we'd like."

The Lung Association credited cleaner diesel engines and controls on coal-fired power plants for decreasing pollution such as soot and dust. However, the report estimates that nearly 30 million people live in areas with chronic levels of pollution so that even when levels are relatively low, people can be exposed to particles that will increase the risk of asthma, lung damage and premature death.

About 24 million people live in 18 counties with unhealthy levels of ozone, short-term particle pollution and year-round particle pollution, the report said, adding that new research shows the risk of health problems from pollution may be worse than once thought, especially for infants and children.

The California Air Resources Board has tripled its estimates of premature deaths in California from particle pollution to 18,000 a year, the report said. Stanich said those numbers were taken from 2008 documents and were in the process of being updated now. He said he expected new numbers in about a month.

Freeways remain high-risk areas for everyone, the study said, increasing the risk of heart attack, allergies, premature births and infant deaths.

The two biggest air pollution threats in the United States are ozone and particle pollution, the Lung Association said. Others include carbon monoxide, lead, nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide and a variety of toxic substances.

For the first time, the association included people living in poverty as one of its at-risk groups, reasoning that people with lower income levels face higher pollution risks.

WORST CITY RANKINGS

By Ozone

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

By Year-Round Particle Pollution

- 1: Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale
- 2: Bakersfield
- 3: Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside
- 3: Visalia-Porterville
- 5: Pittsburgh-New Castle

By Short-Term Particle Pollution

- 1: Bakersfield
- 2: Fresno-Madera
- 3: Pittsburgh-New Castle

4: Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside
5: Birmingham-Hoover-Cullman, Ala.
Source: American Lung Association

S.J., Stockton among state's top 20 most polluted areas

Local officials say report outdated

Stockton Record, Thursday, April 28, 2011

The American Lung Association released its latest State of the Air study this week, and once again San Joaquin County received a failing grade.

On the annual national report card, the Stockton area was given F's once again for its number of days of high ozone (smog) and for particulate pollution (specks of soot, dust and aerosols).

The report - covering the years 2007-09 - also said that 90 percent of all Californians live in areas where the air is unhealthy.

The state dominated lists for the Top 10 most-polluted areas in the nation. The Los Angeles-Long Beach-Riverside area and Bakersfield-Delano were first and second in ozone pollution. The nation's top seven cities for dirty air were all in California.

The county did not make any of the report's Top 10 lists. Stockton was ranked 16th in short-term particle pollution, a slight improvement over last year's Clean Air report. The county as a whole ranked 19th in the same category.

While the findings did note improvement in California, the report by the American Lung Association was criticized as outdated by local air-district officials.

"This (report) overlooks great improvements in air quality in the Valley in recent years," the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said in a written statement. "In fact, the winters of 2009-10 and 2010-11 were the cleanest on record."

The district also pointed out a reduction in "unhealthy" air days, the Valley's unique challenges because of its topography and the study's failure to acknowledge notable regional improvements.

On Wednesday, the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association released its own clean-air report, noting that the state has the strongest regulatory program in the nation and aggressive public and private incentive-based measures to reduce pollution.

The association reported "significant reductions in ozone pollution over the past 30 years and a reduction in the total number of unhealthy air-quality days for the past decade."

According to the American Lung Association, Stockton was one of 12 cities nationwide to improve on the average number of days with high particle levels.

[Fresno Bee Earth Blog, Thursday, April 28, 2011:](#)

San Luis Obispo 11th worst for ozone? Don't believe it

By Mark Grossi

This is why I try to check a little further when I read the American Lung Association's "State of the Air" reports about air quality:

The San Luis Obispo-Paso Robles area was ranked eleventh-worst in the nation for ozone, using data from 2007, 2008 and 2009. I pointed out the same problem last year, but it persists. So listen up, American Lung Association.

There was only one ozone violation for both San Luis Obispo and Paso Robles -- combined -- in that three-year period. Check the 2009 records for San Luis Obispo.

Track all the numbers for San Luis Obispo County at this site.

Yet, San Luis Obispo-Paso Robles is ranked as worse than Dallas-Fort Worth, Modesto and Phoenix-Mesa-Glendale. What happened? The only thing I can figure is that they're using data from a monitoring site called Red Hills, which is south of the Highway 41 and Highway 46 junction. See the red dot on the map?

There are plenty of violations there, because it is on the fringe of the San Joaquin Valley. But it's a long way from the coastal air in San Luis Obispo.

Seyed Sadredin, executive director of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, jokingly said he didn't mind the Valley being compared with San Luis Obispo.

The American Lung Association's report is quoted and respected all over the country, as it should be. The organization has a good reputation. But are there other glitches like this in the report? Maybe it's time to tweak the approach.

Merced County has ninth worst ozone ranking nationwide Air gets an F but progress can be seen

By Carol Reiter

Merced Sun-Star, Thursday, April 28, 2011

Merced County's air got another F rating — but it's a better F this time.

The American Lung Association's annual state of the air report shows Merced has the ninth-worst ozone levels out of 277 metropolitan areas in America.

The association looks at ozone levels and particulate levels. Studies have shown ozone can make asthma and chronic lung conditions worse, and particulates increase the risk of lung cancer, heart attack and stroke. Every county in the Central Valley got an F, along with Mariposa County. The counties that received an A included Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Siskiyou and Sonoma.

"It's a wake-up call to remind us we have very serious pollution that is harming public health," Bonnie Holmes-Gen said. She's the senior director for policy and air quality for the American Lung Association in California.

Some of that pollution is inevitable, according to Henry Forman, a professor of chemistry and biochemistry at UC Merced and an appointed scientist on the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board.

"We sit in a bowl where there's a lot of sunlight, a lot of dust and a lot of traffic going through," Forman said. "And if we didn't have any people living here at all, there would still be a fair amount of ozone because of the geology of the area."

Despite the F rating, there was some good news in the report.

"We have seen a lot of progress in the northern part of the San Joaquin Valley," Holmes-Gen said. "The clean air laws are working."

Although there has been some progress, the Valley has a long way to go before the air can be called clean.

"California is set to adopt a new set of vehicle standards in the fall," Holmes-Gen said. "We can do a lot more to clean up our cars and get more alternative fuel vehicles on the road."

Holmes-Gen said curtailing a lot of wood-burning has made a difference in the Valley's air. "Wood smoke is a big source of pollution in the winter, and the rules are working."

Forman said he believes the air district is doing a good job of trying to decrease the particulates and ozone in the air. But he's also critical of some of the new standards the Environmental Protection Agency is issuing.

"We couldn't meet some of those standards even if there were no people here," Forman said. "We have a natural amount of ozone here. There are a lot of places in the environment where things are toxic, and it's not necessarily something people did. Here we have ozone."

Valley's bad air better, slightly

Pollution causes early death, illness and lost workdays

By Mark Grossi of the Fresno Bee and John Holland of the Modesto Bee
In the Modesto Bee, Thursday, April 28, 2011

Most of the San Joaquin Valley has reduced its air pollution, but the region still has some of the dirtiest air in the nation, said a report Wednesday from the American Lung Association.

It said Stanislaus County had the 12th worst rate of particle pollution, including dust and other lung irritants, out of 277 areas surveyed from 2007 through 2009. It ranked 14th for ozone, a component of smog.

But the county showed progress: Its annual average of unhealthy days for ozone, 19.3, was well down from the 43 in 1996. The average of 12.8 bad days for particles was down by a couple of days from 2000.

Northern San Joaquin Valley counties air quality rankings

The report, "State of the Air 2011," said Bakersfield and Hanford are the only exceptions to a national trend of improving air quality among the 25 cities with the worst particle pollution.

The health of 18.5 million people across the nation is in danger from air pollution, the report said. More than 3.8 million of those people are in the valley.

For more than a decade, valley air quality routinely has been 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 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 director Seyed Sadredin. "It's unfortunate because the whole trend is skewed by 2008."

Quality factors vary

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 areas in the country for particle pollution and ozone. Merced was among the worst 10 for ozone.

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

The improvement must continue to reduce heart and lung problems linked to air pollution, said Norman 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.

Another study estimated that every year in Stanislaus County there are premature deaths of adults related to air pollution as well as asthma attacks, cases of bronchitis and other respiratory ailments, and heart problems.

It also calculated that valley air pollution causes illnesses that result in lost workdays and increased school absences.

Air report shows Valley cities at risk for pollution

Written by Business Journal staff

Business Journal (Fresno) Wed., April 27, 2011

Several Valley cities maintained their places as some of the most polluted areas in the country, according to the latest State of the Air Report by the American Lung Association.

The report attempts to show the health effects of pollution in various parts of the country, including asthma, chronic bronchitis and emphysema. Taking into account risks from ozone and particle pollution in 2009, the report revealed that roughly 58% of the population suffer from pollution levels that are considered too dangerous to breath.

In a list of 25 cities in the country, the Visalia-Porterville metropolitan area came in third as being most at risk for ozone, created when pollutants like nitrogen oxides react with sunlight to form a highly reactive gas that is harmful to the lungs. The Fresno-Madera area followed at number four while Hanford-Corcoran was the sixth most at risk. All three matched rankings from last year's report.

For year-round particle pollution, Visalia was ranked second most at risk, tying three other cities, while Fresno matched last year's ranking at sixth. Hanford was the fifth most at risk, a step down from last year's eighth place ranking.

Among the 25 cities most at risk for ozone, 11 California cities ranked while seven California cities were counted in the list for risk from year-round particle pollution.

All three areas averaged levels higher than the official national standard for year-round particle pollution. On the other hand, Fresno and Bakersfield were identified among air pollution-challenged metropolitan areas with the most-improved ozone scores while Fresno, Visalia and Modesto made noted improvements in reducing particle pollution.

In other data by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Tulare County achieved a 90% reduction in unhealthy air quality days in 2010 for ozone and particle pollution while Fresno County managed a reduction of 83%. Madera County, with fewer than five unhealthy days, had a 78% reduction while 72% fewer unhealthy days were recorded in Kings County.

The entire report can be accessed [here](#).