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California Cities Dominate List of Nation's Most Polluted Regions

Annual report shows air quality improvements in Los Angeles, pollution spikes in Central Valley

Editor's Note: Trend charts, data and rankings for metro areas and counties are available at www.stateoftheair.org/california2017

SACRAMENTO, CA (April 19, 2017) – The American Lung Association's *State of the Air 2017* report found California has the dubious distinction of being home to the majority of the Top 10 cities with ozone and particle pollution in the United States. More than 90 percent of Californians live in areas with unhealthy air at some point during the year, a serious public health concern at a time when the federal government is considering rolling back clean air protections.

"Our state's air quality continues to hit unhealthy levels each year, putting Californians at risk for premature death and other serious health effects such as asthma, COPD, and lung cancer," said Olivia Diaz-Lapham, President and CEO of the American Lung Association in California. "We are seeing continued improvement in parts of the state, but there are too many areas where residents are breathing dirty air and we must work to reduce the sources of air pollution."

California's most populous metro area, Los Angeles, continues to improve, posting its lowest number of unhealthy days for ozone pollution and lowest levels of year-round particle pollution. Unfortunately, the region still leads the nation in unhealthy days for ozone pollution, followed by Bakersfield and the Fresno-Madera area.

Bakersfield topped the national list for the number of unhealthy days for short-term particle pollution and came in second for unhealthy days for ozone pollution and year-round particle pollution levels. As the charts below indicate, the San Joaquin Valley is heavily represented in the Top 10 most polluted regions.

Key Report Findings

- **Significant progress in the fight against ozone** (also known as smog). Eight cities: Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Visalia, Modesto-Merced, Sacramento, El Centro, San Jose-San Francisco and San Luis Obispo, had the fewest average unhealthy days for ozone pollution in the 18-year history of the report.
- **Continued setbacks in the fight against particle pollution** (also known as soot), especially in the San Joaquin Valley.

- Four of the eight San Joaquin Valley counties showed increases in the number of unhealthy days for particle pollution. Visalia and Stockton had their worst years yet.
 - Bakersfield, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Sacramento saw increases in unhealthy days for particle pollution.
 - Year-round levels of particle pollution also increased in Bakersfield, the San Francisco Bay Area, Visalia, and San Luis Obispo, which failed to meet the national standard for year-round particle pollution for the first time.
- **Salinas recognized as one of the cleanest cities.** Salinas landed a spot on two lists of the cleanest cities in the U.S. thanks to zero unhealthy ozone days and one of the lowest year-round particle pollution levels.

The *State of the Air 2017* report is based on air quality monitoring data collected in 2013 – 2015, the most recent years available. The report focuses on ozone and particle pollution, as they are the most widespread forms of air pollution threatening public health.

“Ozone pollution is especially harmful to children, seniors and those with asthma and other lung diseases. When they breathe ozone-polluted air, too often they end up in the doctor’s office, the hospital or the emergency room,” said Dr. Alex Sherriffs, a Fresno area physician and member of the San Joaquin Valley Air District Board and the California Air Resources Board.

The report analyzes particle pollution in two ways: through average annual particle pollution levels and short-term spikes in particle pollution. The *State of the Air 2017* report shows California saw significant spikes in particle pollution, which comes from diesel engine exhaust, wood-burning devices and wildfires.

“These tiny particles, known as soot, can lodge deep in the lungs and trigger asthma attacks, heart attacks and strokes. They can also cause lung cancer and early death,” Dr. Sherriffs said.

Jessica Romero and her husband, Eugene, live in Bakersfield, home to some of the worst air quality in the country. Both of their sons have asthma.

“The poor air quality in Bakersfield has had a huge impact on our family,” Jessica Romero said. “The hardest days are when we have to tell the boys they can’t go outside to ride their bikes or play soccer because of the bad air.”

Here’s how Bakersfield and other California cities ranked nationally:

Ozone Pollution <i>2017 National Rank</i>	Short-Term Particle Pollution <i>2017 National Rank</i>	Year-Round Particle Pollution <i>2017 National Rank</i>
1. Los Angeles-Long Beach	1. Bakersfield	1. Visalia-Porterville-Hanford
2. Bakersfield	2. Fresno-Madera (Tie)	2. Bakersfield
3. Fresno-Madera	Visalia-Porterville-Hanford (Tie)	3. Fresno-Madera
4. Visalia-Porterville-Hanford	4. Modesto-Merced	4. San Jose-San Francisco-Oakland-Stockton
6. Modesto-Merced	6. San Jose-San Francisco-Oakland-Stockton	5. Los Angeles-Long Beach
7. San Diego-Carlsbad	9. Los Angeles-Long Beach	6. Modesto-Merced
9. Sacramento-Roseville		7. El Centro
		10. San Luis Obispo-Paso Robles

In California and nationwide, the number of unhealthy days for ozone has decreased, thanks to the success of the federal Clean Air Act as well as state and local air pollution control programs that clean up major sources of emissions. Air quality laws save lives and must be defended in Congress. Policies to combat climate change also need to be protected.

Climate change is worsening our air pollution problems. Research has shown that climate change causes warmer temperatures that increase ozone formation and make it harder to reach our clean air goals. Climate change is also linked to extreme weather patterns, drought and wildfires, which contributed to the extraordinarily high numbers of days with unhealthy particle pollution in some cities.

“While California continues to move forward with policies like strong standards to reduce vehicle emissions, the federal government wants to move backwards,” said Diaz-Lapham. “We call on President Trump, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt and members of Congress to fully fund, implement and enforce the Clean Air Act for all air pollutants – including those that drive climate change and make it harder to ensure healthy air for all Americans.”

Learn more about California’s grades including local air quality data for each county and metropolitan area at www.stateoftheair.org/california2017. For media interested in speaking with an expert about the State of the Air report, medical experts or lung illness patients impacted by air pollution, please contact Ryan Endean at the American Lung Association in California at (916) 585-7666 or ryan.endean@lung.org.

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About the American Lung Association in California

The American Lung Association in California is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through research, education and advocacy. The Lung Association is focused on four strategic imperatives: to defeat lung cancer, to improve the air we breathe, to reduce the burden of lung disease on individuals and their families, and to eliminate tobacco use and tobacco-related diseases. For more information about the American Lung Association in California or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-685-4872) or visit www.lung.org/california