

## **American Lung Association Releases Annual Air Quality Report:** ***For Pittsburgh, Real Progress Made, Real Problems Remain***

April 27, 2011, PITTSBURGH – Today the American Lung Association (ALA) released its 2011 “State of the Air” report, an annual ranking of air pollution levels across the county. Pittsburgh made progress in this year’s report, with air monitors in the region showing reduced concentrations of unhealthy particulate matter (PM) and ozone pollution. However, pollution levels in the region continue to exceed federal standards, and Pittsburgh continues to compare unfavorably with other metro areas. The Pittsburgh metropolitan area dropped from 5<sup>th</sup> most polluted to 7<sup>th</sup> most polluted for year-round particle pollution and remained at 3<sup>rd</sup> most polluted for short term particle pollution. Allegheny County received “Fs” for both PM and ozone.

“We’re moving in the right direction, but we still have a long way to go,” said Rachel Filippini, GASP executive director. “Until our region meets federal health-based air quality standards, our air will continue to pose a risk to our health and a drain on our economy.”

PM and ozone are linked to such health problems as asthma attacks and possible asthma onset, chronic bronchitis, decreased lung function, heart attacks, strokes, and premature death.

“Our poor air quality is not just some abstract number. It has real consequences: lost loved ones, reduced quality of life, and lost work and school days due to illness,” said Ms. Filippini.

This year, like every other year, some will try to dismiss the ALA report by claiming Pittsburgh’s poor rankings are the result of the study’s reliance on Allegheny County’s Liberty Monitor—where PM levels are elevated due to the nearby Clairton Coke Works. “People can try to claim the study is unfair or inaccurate all they want. The fact is, every region is judged on the basis of its worst monitor, and even if Pittsburgh’s rankings were based on its second-highest monitor instead, Pittsburgh would still rank among the most polluted metropolitan areas,” said Ms. Filippini.

Perhaps most troubling, the hard-won air quality improvements we have made are now threatened by air pollution from the fast-growing Marcellus Shale industry. “While natural gas burns relatively clean, combustion isn’t the whole story,” said Joe Osborne, GASP legal director. “The natural gas production process involves numerous sources of air pollution: exhaust from natural gas compressor engines and trucks, venting from condensate storage tanks, and emissions of raw natural gas during well completions. When all of these emissions are added up, the total quantity of air pollution is astonishing. Natural gas production activity in Wyoming is now causing that state to exceed the federal health based standard for ozone for the first time in history. If we don’t start addressing the air pollution from this industry now, by 2013 or 2014 Pittsburgh may very well find itself at the very top of the ALA’s ‘worst of’ list again.”

### **What can be done to address the PM2.5 problem locally?**

- The Allegheny County Health Department should develop air regulations to control emissions from natural gas drilling.
- Allegheny County and Pittsburgh officials should develop plans to retrofit and/or replace older, polluting diesel vehicles with advanced diesel emission reduction technology.

- Citizens should not idle their personal vehicles and should report any excessive idling of diesel vehicles to the PA Department of Environmental Protection at 1-866-255-5158 or their local police.
- Join GASP's Athletes United for Healthy Air campaign to learn more about minimizing your exposure to air pollution when exercising.

## **More Information**

### **About the ALA Report**

The ALA's State of the Air report is an annual ranking of the areas of the United States with the highest and lowest levels of ozone and particulate matter in the ambient air. Pollutant concentration data is obtained from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The full report is available at:

<http://www.stateoftheair.org/>