

BREATHE PROJECT

The Air We Share



April 21, 2021

Contact:

Debra Smit, Breathe Project, 412-760-7677

dsmit@breatheproject.com

Amanda Gillooly, GASP, 412-716-3929

amanda@gasp-pgh.org

Myron Arnowitt, Clean Water Action, 412-592-1283

marnowitt@cleanwater.org

American Lung Association Annual Report: Pittsburgh Metro Area Places 9th Worst in Country for Year-Round Particle Pollution

Pittsburgh, PA –The Pittsburgh-New Castle-Weirton region still ranks in the top-10 worst regions in the country for long-term fine particle (PM 2.5) pollution exposure, according to the latest “State of the Air” report released today by the American Lung Association (ALA).

The report uses federal air quality monitoring data from 2017-19, the latest available data that is qualified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The ALA provided a [link](#) showing the 2021 grades of all 12 counties included in the Pittsburgh-New Castle-Weirton metro area.

If there is any good news in this report, it’s that Pittsburgh slightly improved its rankings for long-term PM 2.5 exposure over prior years, shifting from 8th worst in 2020 to 9th worst in the 2021 report.

The bad news? Allegheny County – the region’s population center – again has the distinction of scoring straight F’s for exposure to ozone, short-term PM 2.5 and long-term PM 2.5.

Members of the Breathe Collaborative want to emphasize that while the incremental improvements noted in the report are encouraging, there is still much work to do to ensure all residents of Allegheny County have clean air – especially those most vulnerable to air pollution and those living in front-line communities like Clairton and Braddock. In addition:

- The report provides a snapshot of two critical air pollutants with federal standards: fine particles (PM2.5) and ozone. Not included are other federally regulated air pollutants like sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and state regulated ones like hydrogen sulfide (H₂S).
- A portion of southern Allegheny County is currently not meeting the federal sulfur dioxide standard. And hydrogen sulfide pervades the Mon Valley and portions of the City of Pittsburgh in particular with high concentrations of H₂S (widely recognized by its foul, rotten-egg odor) all too often. This year there have already been 21 exceedances of Pennsylvania’s 24-hour average H₂S standard - 13 at ACHD’s Liberty monitor and eight more at its North Braddock monitor.
- The report shows a clear need for Allegheny County leaders to support efforts to reduce emissions of harmful air pollutants to continue improving our regional air quality. With the region again scoring an F for exposure to PM_{2.5} and ozone, the need for stronger coke oven and episodic pollution regulations is clear.
- The report also reiterates the importance of ACHD’s proposed fee schedule changes expected to buoy enforcement and compliance efforts that will help further clean up our air. That fee schedule will soon be before the Allegheny County Council for a vote.

People living in the region, especially in communities in proximity to the region’s largest industrial polluters like Braddock and Clairton, continue to experience degraded quality of life as a result of the region’s poor performance on air quality.

"I live in Emsworth," said Sonia Kowal. "My neighbors and I not only suffer from the poor regional air quality, but we also live directly across the Ohio River from Neville Recycling, Metalico, whose air pollution frequently blows into our neighborhood making us and our families sick. Last week, on April 14th, a fire at Metalico generated smoke and smell that was beyond explanation. My neighbors and I experienced burning throats, burning eyes and it was difficult to breathe. The fire and smoke lasted into the night and we had to leave our homes and stay somewhere else overnight."

Cindy Meckel, a Glassport resident with Valley Clean Air Now stated, "Air quality in Allegheny County is often the worst in the country. It would be wonderful if in each of our next breaths, we would call our leaders in government, the health department AND U.S. Steel to work to get emissions lowered!"

Environmental and public health advocates continue to call upon the region’s leaders to pressure companies that repeatedly violate their air permits and make our air dirtier.

"A recent peer-reviewed study showed that children residing near point sources of air pollution in Allegheny County have asthma rates 2-3 times higher than the state and national rates," said Dr. Deborah Gentile, medical director, Community Partners in Asthma Care. "These children also had

twice the rate of uncontrolled asthma as expected and the majority were African Americans and poor."

"While ALA's report indicates improvements, at the end of the day we are still failing. Polluted air translates into more asthma attacks, heart attacks, and cancer for people in our region, and a deteriorated quality of life for everyone," GASP Executive Director Rachel Filippini said. "Regulators and decision makers need to act more aggressively to improve air quality and treat it like the urgent public health issue that it is."

"Allegheny County Clean Air Now (ACCAN) advocates for improved enforcement of air quality regulations in the Neville Island area," said Angelo Taranto of ACCAN. "The concentration of polluting industries like Metalico in our area subjects our residents to health threats greater than the region as a whole."

"These failing grades should be a wake-up call to local leaders. Allegheny County's polluted air is jeopardizing the health of local residents and holding the region back. It's clear that we aren't doing enough. Allegheny County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and the Health Department need to step up their efforts to rein in harmful air pollution from Allegheny County's 'Toxic Ten' industrial emitters," said Zachary Barber, the Clean Air Advocate with PennEnvironment.

"Reports like the Lung Association's State of the Air show us what environmental racism looks like. Wealthier and whiter communities have raced ahead to clean up their air, leaving communities like Clairton, Duquesne and Braddock in the Mon Valley behind. Allegheny County should act to level the playing field when it comes to having a healthy start in life," stated Myron Arnowitt, Pennsylvania Director for Clean Water Action.

"The report released today by the American Lung Association is further confirmation that we have a lot of work to do to achieve clean air in western Pennsylvania, especially for our most vulnerable residents in frontline communities in the Mon Valley who bear disproportionate impacts from pollution," said PennFuture President and CEO Jacquelyn Bonomo. "One bad air day is one too many, yet the Pittsburgh metro region still experiences dozens of bad air days annually. We can do better than this, and we all deserve better than this. It's time for elected officials of all stripes to commit to ending unhealthy air for all of our communities."

"The failing air quality of Allegheny County is alarming, as it continues to predict poor health outcomes and reduced longevity for more than a million residents," said Alison L. Steele, executive director of the SWPA Environmental Health Project (EHP).

"It is so crucial to increase the penalties on polluters so that they act as a true deterrent to reducing harms to the community," stated Howard Rieger of East End Neighbors for Clean Air. "A 'pay to pollute' system should not permit industry to get away with only minor fines instead of investing in their facilities and fixing the leaks and emissions that do the harm documented in this ALA report."

The ALA 2021 "State of the Air" report can be found at [Lung.org/sota](https://www.lung.org/sota).

Breathe Project

The Breathe Project is a coalition of citizens, environmental advocates, public health professionals and academics using the best available science and technology to improve air quality, eliminate climate pollution and make our region a healthy, prosperous place to live. Learn more at www.breatheproject.org.

Allegheny County Clean Air Now (ACCAN)

Since Shenango shutdown in January 2016, ACCAN has focused on turning the plant site into a solar farm and supporting other communities, especially Neville Island, in their fight for better air quality and improved health outcomes.

Beaver County Marcellus Awareness Community (BCMAC)

As a 501(c)(3) organization, we seek to inform the citizens of Western Pennsylvania, specifically those in Beaver County, about Marcellus Shale gas drilling, and to protect our natural environment by promoting and supporting sustainable energy alternatives to carbon-based energy sources. Learn more at www.marcellusawareness.org

Clean Air Council

A member-supported environmental organization serving the Mid-Atlantic Region since 1967. The Council is dedicated to protecting and defending everyone's right to breathe clean air and uses public education, community action, government oversight and enforcement of environmental laws to advocate for healthy air. Learn more at www.cleanair.org

Clean Air Task Force (CATF)

Clean Air Task Force is a nonprofit environmental organization with offices across the U.S. CATF works to help safeguard against the worst impacts of climate change by catalyzing the rapid global development and deployment of low carbon energy and other climate-protecting technologies through research and analysis, public advocacy leadership and partnership with the private sector. Learn more at <https://www.catf.us>

Clean Water Action (CWA)

Founded during the campaign to pass the landmark Clean Water Act in 1972, Clean Water Action has worked to win strong health and environmental protections by bringing issue expertise, solution-oriented thinking and people power to the table. Learn more at www.cleanwateraction.org.

Community Partners in Asthma Care

Community Partners in Asthma Care is a non-profit whose mission is to provide allergy and asthma education and care in underserved communities.

East End Neighbors

East End Neighbors is a grassroots group of residents, living in and around Squirrel Hill, who advocate to redress the risks to public health due to air pollution in our region.

Environmental Health Project (EHP)

The Southwest Pennsylvania Environmental Health Project (EHP) is a nonprofit public health organization that defends public health in the face of oil and gas development. We provide frontline communities with timely monitoring, interpretation and guidance. We engage diverse stakeholders: health professionals, researchers, community organizers, public servants, and others. We do so because knowledge protects health. Learn more at www.environmentalhealthproject.org.

Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP)

Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit citizens' group in Southwestern Pennsylvania working for a healthy, sustainable environment. Founded in 1969, GASP has been a diligent watchdog, educator, litigator, and policy-maker on many environmental issues, with a focus on air quality in the Pittsburgh region. Find out more at www.gasp-phg.org.

PennEnvironment

PennEnvironment is dedicated to protecting our air, water and open spaces. We investigate problems, craft solutions, educate the public and decision-makers, and help the public make their voices heard in local, state and national debates over the quality of our environment and our lives. Find out more at www.PennEnvironment.org

PennFuture

PennFuture is leading the transition to a clean energy economy in Pennsylvania, fighting big polluters with legal muscle, enforcing environmental laws, and supporting legislative policy that protects public health. PennFuture is engaging and educating citizens about the realities of climate change, and giving them the tools needed to influence lawmakers on the issues. Find out more at www.pennfuture.org.

Protect PT

Protect PT (Penn-Trafford) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to ensuring residents' safety, security, and quality of life by engaging in education and advocacy to protect the economic, environmental, and legal rights of the people in Westmoreland and Allegheny counties. Learn more at www.protectpt.org.

Women for a Healthy Environment

Educates and empowers community members to act as ambassadors about environmental risks so that they can make healthy choices and advocate for change for a better tomorrow for all. At the core of WHE's work is protecting children from harmful exposures in the environment and creating healthy places for them to live, learn and play. Learn more at www.womenforahealthyenvironment.org

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