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Alert

Alert is a monthly update on transportation and air quality planning activities in the Delaware Valley.

Air Quality and Health

Greater Philadelphia Region Falls out of the Top 25 Worst Regions for Ozone Pollution.

The American Lung Association (ALA) has been publishing an annual "State of the Air" Report each April for the past 23 years. For the first time since the report was created, the Philadelphia-Reading-Camden PA-NJ-DE-MD metropolitan region[1] is not listed in the top 25 most polluted regions for ground-level ozone.

The ALA used the $PM_{2.5}$ daily standard of 35mg/m^3, adopted in September 2006; the $PM_{2.5}$ annual standard of 12mg/m^3, adopted in September 2012; and the ozone standard of 70 parts per billion, adopted in October 2015, to determine the unhealthy ranges for particle pollution and ozone. The results of the "State of the Air" report are based on the number of days that violated these standards for the years 2018-2020.

According the report, the number of high ozone days in the Greater Philadelphia region fell during this period to a 20-year low, averaging seven days that violated the ozone standard each year. This is down from an average of ten violating days in the previous three-year period (2017-2019) and over 70 days per year during the 1997-1999 period when using the standards that are in place today.

Despite the vast improvement, the ALA report gives the region an "F" grade for ozone pollution with Camden, Mercer, Bucks and Philadelphia counties receiving failing grades for the number of high ozone days.

The region still makes the list for most polluted cities for long-term or annual fine particle pollution ($PM_{2.5}$), although it has received passing grades for both short-term (24-hour) and annual $PM_{2.5}$. The region ranks 18th worst for annual average $PM_{2.5}$ in this year's "State of the Air" report.

The ALA credits the Clean Air Act for reducing emissions from transportation, power plants, and manufacturing but warns that climate change is making it harder to meet the health-based standards. The report notes that wildfires, attributed to drought and higher tempartures associated with climate change, have resulted in spikes in particle pollution and high ozone days. The wildfires add challenges to the work that states, regions, and cities are doing to clean up air pollution. The years 2018-2020 rank among the seven hottest years on record globally.

The report points out that the dichotomy of effective air pollution controls and the impacts of climate change on air quality are resulting in a growing disparity in air quality between eastern and western states. Eastern states, whose air pollution was historically attributable to transportation and industrial sources, has been improving largely due to air pollution controls, while air quality in western states has been declining due to wildfires and pollution events being driven by rising temperatures. The report also points out the disparites in air quality

Save the Date

Ongoing

PA DEP Level 2 EV Charging Station Rebates

For more information, please visit:

www.dep.pa.gov and search "Level 2 Charging Rebates"

Ongoing

NJDEP
It Pay$ to Plug-In Workplace Charging Grants

For more information, please visit:

nj.gov/dep/drivegreen/plugin.html

experienced by white people and people of color, with people of color being 61% more likely than white people to live in a county with a failing grade for at least one pollutant.

To view the entire 2022 “State of the Air” report, including grading methodology and statistical analysis, please visit the American Lung Association at www.stateoftheair.org.

[1] The Philadelphia-Reading-Camden PA-NJ-DE-MD metropolitan region includes Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Berks Counties in PA; Camden, Burlington, Gloucester, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem Counties in NJ; New Castle and Kent Counties in Delaware; and Cecil County in Maryland.

Air Quality Partnership

May Kicks Off the Beginning of Greater Philadelphia’s Ozone Season

Every year on May 1, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Pennsylvania and New Jersey Departments of Environmental Protection (DEPs), and DVRPC’s Air Quality Partnership begin providing daily ground-level ozone forcasts to the public.

Late spring through summer (May through September) is generally when the Greater Philadelphia region experiences the poorest air quality of the year. One of the region’s most persistant pollutants is ground-level ozone, also known as smog, which results from pollutants from sources like cars, trucks, and power plants being converted into smog through a chemica process driven by the energy from sunlight.

The purpose of the air quality forecasts is two-fold: 1) to alert people that ground-level ozone can pose a significant public health risk, especially for people who suffer from respiratory problems, and 2) to encourage the public to take individual actions to help reduce the emissions that contribute to air pollution on days when poor air quality is predicted. Public actions to reduce emissions on poor air quality days, such conserving energy or teleworking, have been shown to reduce the duration of poor air quality episodes as well as peak pollutant levels.

Poor air quality affects everyone, but some people are particularly sensitive to air pollutants, including people who are active outdoors, and people with respiratory diseases such as asthma. When air quality is predicted to be unhealthy for sensitive groups (Code Orange or worse on the Air Quality Index), EPA and the states will announce an air quality alert for the affected areas. EPA and the Center for Disease Control recommend that people in these areas limit strenuous outdoor activity.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to protect the public’s lung health. Research has shown that people that have experienced damage to their lungs from pollution are more susceptible to infection. Fortunately, the tools to help the public be aware of poor air quality days are well established and easily accessible.

Free air quality alerts are available through DVRPC’s Air Quality Partnership website (www.AirQualityPartnership.org) or the EPA’s www.EnviroFlash.info website. Individuals and organizations can sign up for this free email or text message service simply by providing an email address and zip code. DVRPC can share the air quality forecast graphic with planning partners who are interested in hosting the information on their websites. This information is updated automatically by the EPA.

Recipients can expect between 10 and 25 alert days per summer. Fine particle pollution ($PM_{2.5}$) forecasts are also available year-round, although the region experiences just a few wintertime $PM_{2.5}$ episodes each year.

For more information about the Air Quality Partnership or air quality forecasts, please email Sean Greene, Manager of Air Quality Programs, at sgreene@dvrpc.org.

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