

Public Statement on 2021 American Lung Association State of the Air Report

April 21, 2021

Background:

Today, the American Lung Association (ALA) released its 2021 State of the Air (SOTA) Report, offering various snapshots into air quality in metropolitan areas and counties across the United States. The annual report analyzes monitoring data reported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with respect to three criteria, awarding letter grades for ozone (smog) and short-term particulate matter (fine particles), and a “pass/fail” grade for long-term particulate matter. The ALA uses only validated data, so the 2021 report takes into consideration data reported for the three years from 2017-2019.

Within the metropolitan region of Pittsburgh-New Castle, PA-Weirton, WV, Allegheny County continued its trend as having some of the worst reported air quality in the nation. It was judged the 35th worst U.S. county in ozone, 16th worst in short-term particulate matter, and 9th worst in long-term particulate matter. Some surrounding counties appeared to fare better, however limitations in air quality monitoring of rural areas can wildly skew results. Monitors often do not capture the air quality of people living in proximity to sources of emissions, so the ALA report should not be relied upon to determine the air quality of every resident in the county.

Selected Counties in Metro Area	Ozone Grade	Short-term PM	Long-term PM	Population
Allegheny, PA	F	F	Fail	1,216,045
Beaver, PA	D	B	Pass	163,929
Washington, PA	B	A	Pass	206,865
Westmoreland, PA	B	A	Pass	348,899

The full 2021 ALA SOTA report can be viewed [here](#).

SWPA Environmental Health Project Statement:

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. In other southwestern Pennsylvania counties, the American Lung Association grades may appear better, but they are based on limited information, which can inadvertently obscure troubling health risks that we know exist. People living in proximity to the web of shale gas wells, compressor stations, pipelines, and processing plants are exposed to air emissions not captured by the existing monitoring network – air emissions that raise the likelihood these residents will suffer negative health impacts.

The EPA monitors, on which the State of the Air Report relies for data, were not located in places that would have captured and reported localized emissions that residents breathe. Additionally, the State of the Air Report uses particulate matter data that is reported as a 24-hour average. Values averaged over time lose detail and do not reveal the shorter-term peaks in emissions – some as short as 15 minutes. These intermittent peaks can affect the health of residents, especially those most vulnerable, such as children, the elderly, and those with pre-existing conditions. While the State of the Air Report offers a broad panorama of air quality countywide, it should not be used to assess air quality for residents located in the vicinity of industrial sources of emissions.

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