Press Release

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Air Pollution in Delaware: Philadelphia Metro Area Continues to Rank Among Worst 25 Cities in Nation for Ozone and Year-round Particle Pollution, But All 3 Delaware Counties Improve for Ozone Smog, Finds 2021 'State of the Air' Report

American Lung Association's annual air quality report finds over 40% of Americans breathing unhealthy air; New Castle County Continues to Earn "F" for Ozone, "C" for Daily Measure of Fine Particle Pollution—for which Kent, Sussex Counties earn 10th "A's" in a row.

Editor's Note: The full report, as well as trend charts and rankings for metropolitan areas and county grades, B-roll and images, is available at Lung.org/sota.

WILMINGTON, DE (April 21, 2021)–This year's "State of the Air" report from the American Lung Association finds that the 16-county Philadelphia-Reading-Camden, PA-NJ-DE-MD metro area, which includes Delaware's New Castle and Kent Counties, ranked as the 17th most polluted city in the nation for its year-round average levels of fine particle pollution and as the 21st most polluted for days with high levels of ozone smog. In addition, the report found that the Philadelphia area's measure for daily spikes of fine particle pollution was significantly worse than in last year's report. See the full report, based on the three years of data from 2017 through 2019, at Lung.org/sota .

The worst grades in Delaware for the daily measure of particle pollution (a "C" grade) and ozone smog (an "F" grade) both were posted in New Castle County and remain of concern even though the latter showed improvement over last year's results. "Clearly, both show room for improvement and more must be done to protect the health of people at risk," said American Lung Association Director of Environmental Health Kevin Stewart. "There are still many days when the air pollution levels are high enough to harm health and trigger asthma attacks, heart attacks and stroke, placing children, older adults, and people living with chronic lung and heart disease at particular risk. Ozone and particle pollution are the nation's most harmful and widespread air pollutants, and both can be deadly. In addition, more exposure to particle pollution is linked to worse health outcomes from COVID-19, including more deaths."

"The American Lung Association's 2021 'State of the Air' report shows that despite some nationwide progress on cleaning up air pollution, more than 40% of Americans live with unhealthy ozone or particle pollution," said Stewart. "People of color are significantly more likely to breathe polluted air than white people. As the nation works to address climate change and continue reducing air pollution, we must prioritize the health of disproportionately burdened communities."

Ozone Pollution in Delaware - Compared to the 2020 report, all three Delaware counties experienced fewer unhealthy days of high ozone, achieving a new best-ever performance in New Castle County (a weighted average of 5.3 days with unhealthy levels of ozone) and Sussex County (1.7 days). In fact, Sussex County earned a "C," better than its "D" in last year's report. Though New Castle and Kent Counties improved in absolute terms, their grades remained unchanged from the "F" and "C" they earned, respectively, in last year's report. The metro area containing Sussex County posted a worse weighted average of 1.8 days for Dorchester County, MD, on the strength of which the Salisbury-Cambridge, MD-DE metro area ranked 80th worst in the country.

"Ozone pollution can harm even healthy people, but is particularly dangerous for children, older adults and people with lung diseases such as COPD or asthma," said Stewart. "Breathing ozone-polluted air can trigger asthma attacks in both adults and children with asthma, which can land them in the doctor's office or the emergency room. Ozone can even shorten people's lives."

Particle Pollution in Delaware "State of the Air" 2021 found that although **year-round particle pollution levels** in the Philadelphia metro area again reached a high of 10.7 µg/m^3 (micrograms per cubic meter) in Delaware County, PA for 2017-2019, the highest level in the First State was much lower—New Castle County's mark of 7.8 µg/m^3, according to figures reported after two reports with incomplete data. In turn, Sussex County worsened slightly to post a concentration of 6.8 µg/m^3, the highest value in the Salisbury-Cambridge metro area. That metro ranked 168th worst in the country, in contrast to the Philadelphia metro area's 17th worst position nationally.

The report also tracked **short-term spikes in particle pollution**, which can be extremely dangerous and even lethal. Although Kent and Sussex Counties published their 10th straight "A's" in a row for this pollutant measure, New Castle County has not posted any "A" grade under the current standard. Nevertheless, New Castle County continues at its best-ever weighted average of 1.0 day for short-term fine particle pollution. With its "A's," the Salisbury-Cambridge metro area continued for its 10th year being on the list of cleanest cities in the nation, in contrast to the Philadelphia metro area's rank of 39th worst.

"Particle pollution can lodge deep in the lungs and can even enter the bloodstream. It can trigger asthma attacks, heart attacks and strokes and cause lung cancer," said Stewart. Particle pollution comes from industry, coal-fired power plants, construction, agriculture, vehicles, wildfires and wood-burning devices."

The year's report found that nationwide, more than four in 10 people (135 million) lived with polluted air, placing their health and lives at risk. In Delaware, air pollution placed the health of the nearly one million New Castle, Kent and Sussex County residents at risk, including those who are more vulnerable to the effects of air pollution, such as older adults, children and people with a lung disease. The report also shows that people of color were 61% more likely to live in a county with unhealthy air than white people, and three times more likely to live in a county that failed all three air quality grades. The report also finds that climate change made air quality worse and harder to clean up.

The Lung Association's annual air quality "report card" tracks and grades Americans' exposure to unhealthful levels of particle pollution (also known as soot) and ozone (smog) over a three-year period—this year's report covers 2017-2019. The report analyzes particle pollution in two ways: average annual levels and short-term spikes. Both ozone and particle pollution can cause premature death and other serious health effects such as asthma attacks and cardiovascular damage, and are linked to developmental and reproductive harm. Particle pollution can also cause lung cancer.

Learn more about "State of the Air" at Lung.org/sota-petition and sign the petition for the Biden Administration to promote clean air, a safe climate and environmental justice. Media interested in

speaking with an expert about lung health, clean air and threats to air quality can contact Val.Gleason at Val.Gleason@Lung.org or 717-971-1123.

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About the American Lung Association
The American Lung Association is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through education, advocacy and research. The work of the American Lung Association is focused on four strategic imperatives: to defeat lung cancer; to champion clean air for all; to improve the quality of life for those with lung disease and their families; and to create a tobacco-free future. For more information about the American Lung Association, a holder of the coveted 4-star rating from Charity Navigator and a Gold-Level GuideStar Member, or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872) or visit: Lung.org.

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