

Alert

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

Health and Air Quality

DVRPC Region Listed in Top 25 Worst Regions in the Nation for Poor Air Quality

The Philadelphia-Reading-Camden PA-NJ-DE-MD metropolitan region¹ has been ranked in the top 25 most polluted regions for ground-level ozone and annual fine particles (PM_{2.5}) by the American Lung Association (ALA) in their State of the Air report released in April 2019. The region was ranked as the 18th worst region for long-term (annual average) fine particle pollution (PM_{2.5}) and 21st for ozone pollution. The ALA used quality-assured data for the period 2015 to 2017 to develop the 2019 report card on ozone and particle pollution for the nation's cities and counties.

The report also ranks individual counties based on the number of days that air quality reaches unhealthy levels (code orange and above) on the Air Quality Index. All eight counties in the DVRPC region that were graded, received a grade of "F" for ozone pollution. Burlington County does not have an air quality monitor and was not graded in this report. Despite being ranked the 18th worst metro region in the nation for annual particle pollution, all of the counties in the DVRPC region that were graded, received passing grades for PM_{2.5} pollution. The region continued to improve for particle pollution from previous State of the Air reports, dropping to 18th on the list from 12th in 2018.

The ALA used the PM_{2.5} daily standard of 35mg/m³, adopted in September 2006; the PM_{2.5} annual standard of 12mg/m³, 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 2019 State of the Air report shows positive trends in the nation's air quality with regards to fine particle pollution but notes that 2016 and 2017 had spikes in the number of high ozone days across the nation. The ALA attributes the increase in unhealthy ozone days to rising temperatures, as the period 2015-2017 were the three hottest years on record and sunlight and elevated temperatures provide energy that drives the chemical reaction that forms ground-level ozone from pollutants.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), national concentrations of ozone and fine particle pollution dropped by 5% and 18% respectively, between 2010 and 2016, even while Gross Domestic Product, vehicle miles travelled, and population all continued to grow, over the same time period.

The ALA report notes that ozone levels in the eastern US have shown two consecutive years with increases in unhealthy ozone days. The number of unhealthy ozone days are still well below 2010 levels despite these setbacks.



Save the Date

Friday
June 28, 2019
Application Deadline for
DVRPC Congestion
Mitigation and Air Quality
(CMAQ) Program in PA

For information on the
funding program, please
visit:
www.dvrpc.org/cmaq

Friday
July 12, 2019
First Application Review for
PA DEP Alternative Fuel
Incentive Grant Program

For information on the grant
program, please visit:
www.depgis.state.pa.us/
Click "Grants"

The report credits the Clean Air Act's science based regulations with drastically improving the nation's air quality since 1970 but raises concerns about challenges to the Clean Air Act and the EPA's ability to implement the Act's regulations by the Trump Administration. The reports also raises concerns about the impacts of climate change on air quality and particularly the impacts that higher temperatures may have on ozone formation.

To view the entire 2019 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 Poor Air Quality 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 forecasts 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. The region's leading air pollutant is ground-level ozone, also known as smog, which requires the energy from summertime sunlight to "bake" pollutants from sources like cars, trucks, and power plants into smog.

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.

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.

On these days, the public and businesses are also encouraged to take actions that will help reduce air pollution and protect the public health. If enough people take actions – such as using public transportation or carpooling, using less electricity by turning air conditioning to a higher temperature setting, and avoiding using small gasoline-powered engines – pollutant levels can be lowered to more healthy levels across the region.

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 all year, 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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