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## **NORTH CAROLINA'S AIR QUALITY REPORT CARD: LESS SMOG, MORE SOOT**

### ***Research shows need for more protective federal air standards***

(Raleigh, NC), May 1, 2007— North Carolina's air improved this year, according to the American Lung Association's annual air quality report card, *State of the Air: 2007*. North Carolina measured significant improvements in ozone (smog) from previous reports but suffered worsening levels of particle pollution, as did most areas east of the Mississippi River. For the first time since the American Lung Association began issuing its annual air quality report card in 2000, data reveals a split picture along either side of the Mississippi River, as particle pollution—the most dangerous pollutant—increased in the East but decreased in the West, while ozone decreased nationwide from peaks reported in 2002.

"Our improved ozone grades are certainly good news, but the increase in particle pollution is a particularly troubling trend," said Susan King Cope, Vice President of Programs and Advocacy. "As a state, North Carolina still has a long way to go to have air that is safe for everyone to breathe. Science clearly shows that air pollution is dangerous—even deadly—at levels we once thought were safe. To really protect North Carolinians from air pollution, we need the EPA to set more protective air quality standards so all of us can have truly clean air."

Nationwide, the number of counties scoring an A grade for ozone levels increased from 82 in 2000 to 145 this year. However, particle pollution levels show an ominous trend, with F grades nearly doubling in just one year. Particle pollution levels rose in the eastern U.S. because heavily polluting power plants generated more electricity. In the West, by contrast, soot levels continue to drop even in areas that rank historically high in particle pollution. California showed the most improvement, with 32 counties dropping their year-round particle pollution levels.

Ozone pollution dropped due to a late 1990s requirement to clean up emissions of the raw ingredients of smog, as well as cooler summers in 2003 and 2004. Smog levels stayed down even when the heat returned in summer 2005 in much of the East thanks to controls put in place by 2004 on nitrogen oxide emissions from coal-fired power plants. In the West, particularly in California, aggressive measures to reduce emissions from a wide range of air pollution sources (including cars and trucks) contributed to fewer high ozone days.

"The good news is that there's less ozone in North Carolina and throughout most of the U.S. Yet, we remain concerned because the science shows that millions are still at risk from ozone pollution," Deborah Bryan, CEO/President of the American Lung Association of North Carolina.

"Breathing ozone smog threatens serious health risks, including new evidence that links it to premature death," she added. "So to really protect North Carolinians from ozone smog, we need EPA to set new standards for ozone at levels that would protect public health as the Clean Air Act requires."

The American Lung Association *State of the Air: 2007* ranks cities and counties most polluted by ozone, 24-hour particle pollution, and annual particle pollution, and reports county-by-county populations at risk from unhealthy levels of the most dangerous forms of air pollution.

While air pollution is unsafe for everyone, some people are at increased risk because of their age or health situation. Those groups include people with asthma, adults 65 and older, children under 18, people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD – chronic bronchitis and emphysema) and anyone with cardiovascular disease or diabetes.

### ***Ozone and Particle Pollution Snapshots***

The report estimates that North Carolinians most at risk of breathing dangerous levels of ozone are 1.6 million children and 715,200 seniors and those with increased risk factors, such as:

- 143,341 children with asthma and 314,015 adults with asthma;
- 196,373 with chronic bronchitis and 80,018 with emphysema; and
- 1.4 million North Carolinians with cardiovascular disease.

Nationwide, 46 percent (136 million people) of the U.S. population lives in 251 counties where they are exposed to unhealthy levels of air pollution in the form of either ozone or short-term or year-round levels of particles. About 38.3 million Americans – nearly one in 8 people – live in 32 counties with unhealthy levels of all three: ozone and short-term and year-round particle pollution. One-third of the U.S. population lives in areas with unhealthy levels of ozone, a significant reduction since the last report when nearly half did, yet that still means 99 million Americans live in counties with F grades for ozone.

Roughly 45 percent of people (more than 2.9 million) in North Carolina lives in an area with unhealthy short-term levels of particle pollution, a significant increase since the last report, which is only partially due to the new, slightly lower threshold of unhealthy air recognized in this report (based on the newly adopted national standards). Nearly 17 percent of people (more than 1.1 million) in the United States who live in an area with unhealthy year-round levels of particle pollution.

Even though pollution levels there have dropped, the greater Mecklenburg County area ranked as the most polluted city in North Carolina for both ozone and particle pollution. Other counties ranking among the worst for ozone include Cumberland, Davie, Granville, Lincoln, Rowan and Wake. Those on the lists of the worst for particle pollution include Catawba and Davidson.

Overall, North Carolina's air quality score improved this year, measuring significant improvements in ozone but suffering worsening levels of particle pollution. Here are some of the most significant changes in this year's report:

Duplin County's short term particulate grade improved from a B to an A; Chatham, Lenoir, Mitchell, New Hanover, Onslow, Orange and Robeson Counties each dropped their grade from an A to a B; Alamance, Watauga, Wayne and Caswell Counties each dropped their grade from a B to a C; McDowell County's grade dropped from an A to a D; Catawba County's grade dropped from a B to a D; Durham and Davidson Counties each dropped their grade from a C to a D; Forsyth and Wake Counties each dropped their grade from a C to an F and Guilford and Mecklenburg Counties each dropped their grade from a D to an F.

But there is some good news. New Hanover County's ozone grade improved from a B to an A and Avery County's improved from a C to an A. However, even greater improvement is seen in Buncombe and Yancey Counties, each rising from a D to a B; Martin, Caldwell, Pitt, Caswell, Rockingham, Durham, Person, Edgecombe, Johnston, Forsyth, Franklin and Guilford Counties each improved their grade from an F to a C; Chatham, Alexander and Union Counties each improved their grade from an F to a B and Haywood County's grade improved from an F to an A!

"The American Lung Association is fighting for tougher federal standards because they protect Americans from dangerous levels of air pollution," said Ralph Whatley, MD, Chairman, Department of Internal Medicine at East Carolina University Brody School of Medicine. "Air pollution shortens lifespan, it lands our children and elderly in emergency rooms, and it can make children and teens more vulnerable to lung disease for the rest of their lives."

To see the grades for the air quality in your community in the American Lung Association State of the Air: 2007 report and learn how you can protect yourself and your family from air pollution, go to [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org). While you're there, you can send a message to the U.S. EPA to set more protective standards for ozone and other pollutants.

### **About the American Lung Association**

Beginning our second century, the American Lung Association is the leading organization working to prevent lung disease and promote lung health. Lung disease death rates continue to increase while other leading causes of death have declined. The American Lung Association funds vital research on the causes of and treatments for lung disease. With the generous support of the public, the American Lung Association is "Improving life, one breath at a time." For more information about the American Lung Association or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNG-USA (1-800-586-4872) or log on to [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org).

To review a copy of the *State of the Air: 2007*, please visit: <http://www.lungnc.org>

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