

Atlantic Cities: California's Metros Take the Prize for 2014's Most- Polluted U.S. Cities

<http://www.theatlanticcities.com/jobs-and-economy/2014/04/most-polluted-cities-america/9003/>

Citizens of California, take out your Kleenex and hack up some phlegm in victory! Your state has once again beat out the rest of the nation in sheer quantities of [air pollution](#), according to new report from the [American Lung Association](#).

In the broad view, the country is still suffering from dismal levels of pollution, says the ALA in its "State of the Air 2014." (The report actually covers 2010 to 2012, for what it's worth.) More than 147 million people, or roughly half the nation, live in places with unhealthy concentrations of ozone or particulate pollution. Fifty-three million others reside in areas that the association has slapped with a most troublesome "F grade" for pollution.

The health implications of this coast-to-coast blanketing of foulness are hard to overstate. Such pollution is tied to a wheezing horde of ailments, from asthma attacks to heart disease to [premature deaths](#). Last year, the World Health Organization announced that airborne contaminants are causing lung cancer, and [deemed](#) outdoors air the "most widespread environmental carcinogen" in existence. And of course at greatest risk of air pollution's withering touch are society's most vulnerable: the elderly, children, and [people with low incomes](#).

Some more bad news: Levels of ozone have gone up in the United States since the association's last report covering 2009 to 2011. That fact can be attributed to the past years' number of warm summers. Los Angeles, Houston, the Washington-Baltimore area, New York and other major cities

logged worse ozone problems and, in a twist, they're likely to have even poorer conditions if climate trends continue on their torrid course. "We know that warmer temperatures increase risk for ozone pollution," says ALA president Harold Wimmer, "so climate change sets the stage for tougher challenges to protect human health."

Now, here's the silver lining of this carboniferous cloud. There's less particulate pollution throughout the United States and several cities reached their lowest-ever annual levels of particles on record, including Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Atlanta, and Indianapolis. The ALA gives a special shout-out to a few burbs that it dubs America's "cleanest cities" for having no days with unhealthy levels of particles or ozone – pat yourself on the back if you live in Bangor, Maine; Bismarck, North Dakota; Cape Coral-Fort Myers, Florida; and Salinas, California. The association attributes the nationwide drop in particulate matter to the clean-up of coal power plants and cleaner kinds of diesel engines.

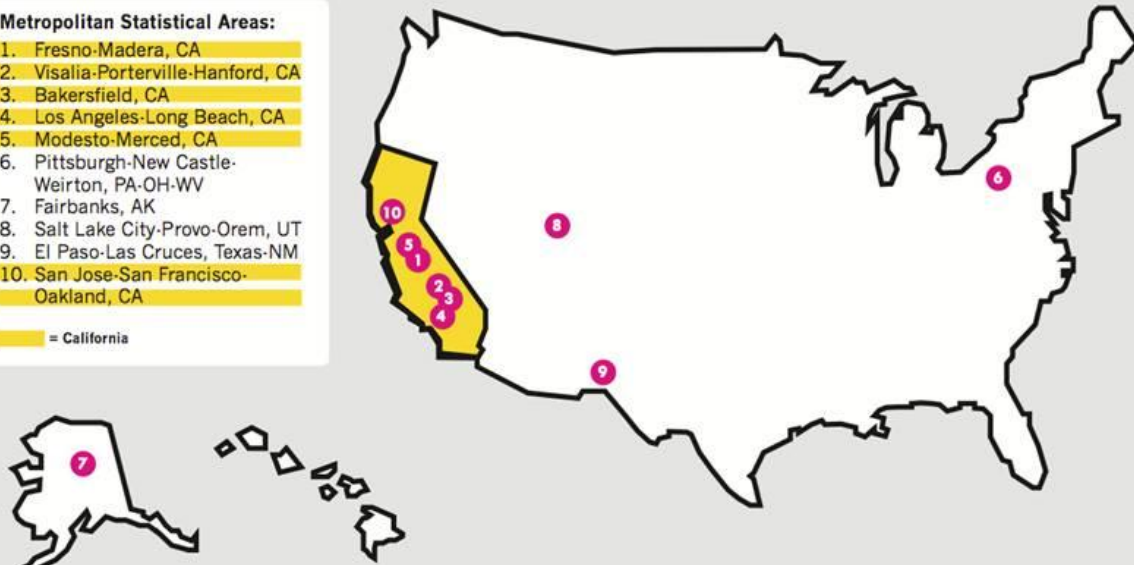
You can find the ALA's complete ranking of most-polluted cities below. Note that while these urban centers are marred with nasty air, it doesn't mean they're not working to fix the problem. Los Angeles, for instance, has [managed to cut](#) its number of unhealthy ozone days by more than a third in the past 15 years. And Pittsburgh is now experiencing annual concentrations of particle pollution one-third lower than what they once were. The ALA predicts that things will continue to improve if power plants clean up their operations and the Environmental Protection Agency strengthens its "outdated ozone standards."

TOP 10 U.S. CITIES MOST POLLUTED BY SHORT-TERM PARTICLE POLLUTION (24-hour PM 2.5)

Metropolitan Statistical Areas:

1. Fresno-Madera, CA
2. Visalia-Porterville-Hanford, CA
3. Bakersfield, CA
4. Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA
5. Modesto-Merced, CA
6. Pittsburgh-New Castle-Weirton, PA-OH-WV
7. Fairbanks, AK
8. Salt Lake City-Provo-Orem, UT
9. El Paso-Las Cruces, Texas-NM
10. San Jose-San Francisco-Oakland, CA

■ = California

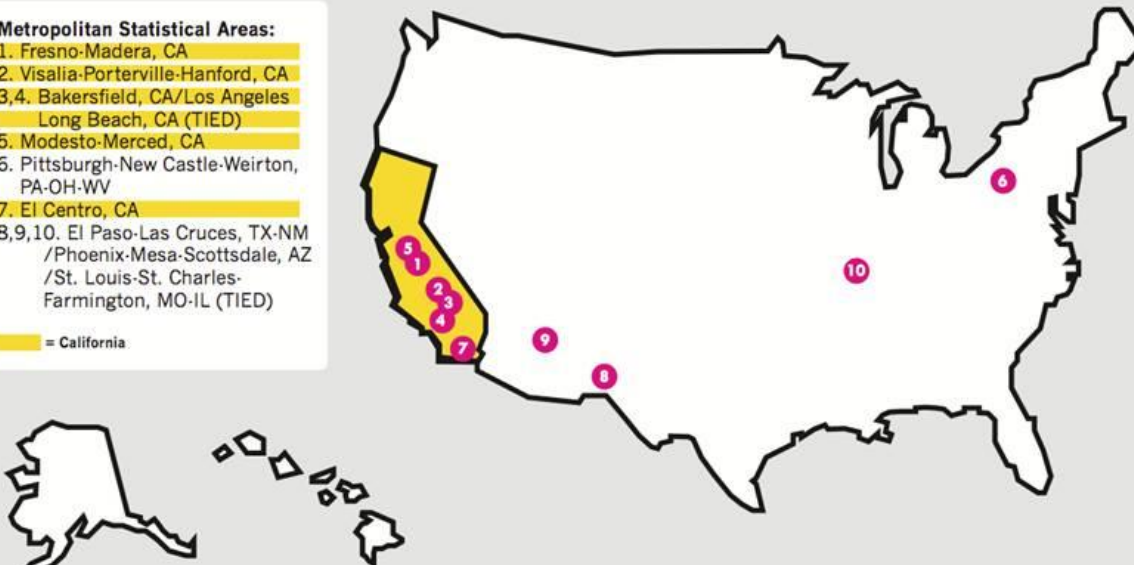


TOP 10 U.S. CITIES MOST POLLUTED BY YEAR-ROUND PARTICLE POLLUTION (Annual PM 2.5)

Metropolitan Statistical Areas:

1. Fresno-Madera, CA
2. Visalia-Porterville-Hanford, CA
- 3,4. Bakersfield, CA/Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA (TIED)
5. Modesto-Merced, CA
6. Pittsburgh-New Castle-Weirton, PA-OH-WV
7. El Centro, CA
- 8,9,10. El Paso-Las Cruces, TX-NM / Phoenix-Mesa-Scottsdale, AZ / St. Louis-St. Charles-Farmington, MO-IL (TIED)

■ = California

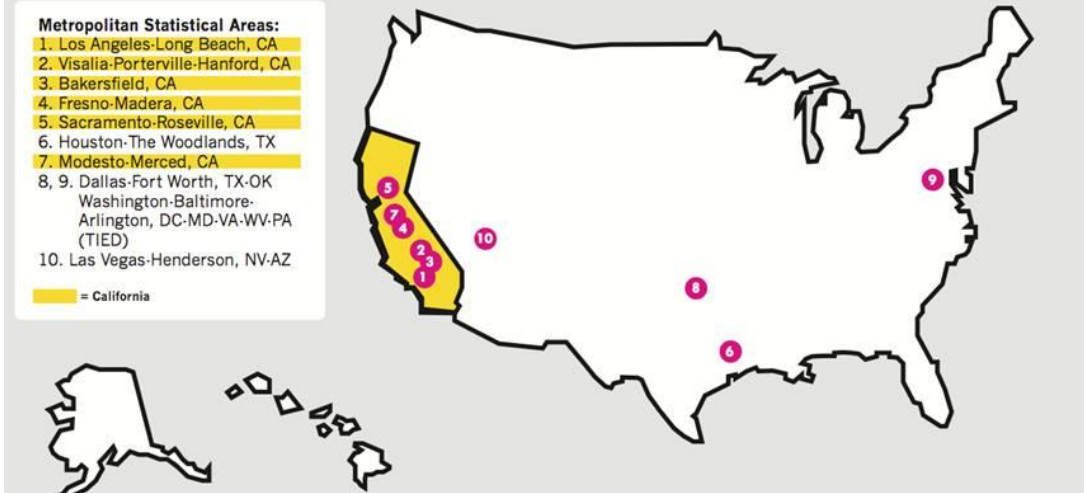


TOP 10 MOST OZONE-POLLUTED U.S. CITIES

Metropolitan Statistical Areas:

1. Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA
2. Visalia-Porterville-Hanford, CA
3. Bakersfield, CA
4. Fresno-Madera, CA
5. Sacramento-Roseville, CA
6. Houston-The Woodlands, TX
7. Modesto-Merced, CA
- 8, 9. Dallas-Fort Worth, TX-OK
Washington-Baltimore-
Arlington, DC-MD-VA-WV-PA
(TIED)
10. Las Vegas-Henderson, NV-AZ

■ = California



Map illustrations by Mark Byrnes