****

 **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**For more information, contact:**

Merisa Ashbaugh Susannah Fuchs

The Hauser Group American Lung Association in Missouri

309.335.5453 314.449.9149

**2023 AIR QUALITY FORECASTING SEASON KICKS OFF AS LATEST “STATE OF THE AIR” REPORT REVEALS**

**GOOD AND BAD NEWS FOR THE ST. LOUIS REGION**

*St. Louis avoids top 25 most ozone-polluted cities list for seventh consecutive year, but still receives poor grades for overall air quality*

**ST. LOUIS, MO., May 1, 2023 . . .** As daily air quality forecasting makes its return for the 2023 season May 1st, the American Lung Association’s latest “State of the Air” report finds that, after decades of progress on cleaning up sources of air pollution, nearly 36% of Americans – 119.6 million people – still live in places with failing grades for unhealthy levels of ozone or particle pollution. While ozone air pollution remains a serious threat to public health, this is 17.6 million fewer people breathing unhealthy air compared to the years covered by the 2022 report (2018-2020), which reinforces the trend in this year’s “State of the Air” report is continuing in a more positive direction.

For the seventh consecutive year, the St. Louis region escaped being ranked among the top 25 most ozone-polluted cities in the U.S., coming in at number 35 on the list out of 227 metropolitan areas. The area ranked 27th on the list for most polluted cities by year-round particle pollution, which is back three spots from the previous year. The most up-to-date report findings have added to the evidence that a changing climate is making it harder to protect human health, with the three years included in this year’s report (2019-2021) ranking among the seven hottest years on record globally. Therefore, high ozone days and spikes in particle pollution related to heat, drought and wildfires are putting millions of people at risk and adding challenges to the work that states and cities are doing across the nation to clean up air pollution. Here’s a look at the latest rankings for ozone pollution across the region for counties in the non-attainment area included in the American Lung Association’s [report](https://www.lung.org/research/sota):

**Missouri Illinois**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Jefferson | D | Jersey | C |
| St. Charles | F | Macoupin | A |
| St. Louis County | F | Madison | F |
| St. Louis City | D | St. Clair | C |

“It’s encouraging to see that St. Louis has once again escaped the list of the most ozone-polluted cities with more counties in the bi-state area receiving a better grade in this year’s annual “State of the Air” report compared to last year,” said Susannah Fuchs, Director of Clean Air for the American Lung Association in Missouri. “However, there is still much work to be done to protect our local communities and constituents from the growing risks to public health as we prepare to settle into summer when we’re at greater risk for elevated levels of ozone pollution.”

According to the 2023 “State of the Air” report, more than 30% of the nation’s population – including 23.6 million children, 15.4 million people age 65 or older, and millions in other groups at high risk of health harm – are exposed to high levels of ozone on enough days to earn the air they breathe a failing grade. Albeit an alarming figure, the number of people living in counties with a failing grade for ozone actually declined by more than 19 million this year, with 39 counties in 23 states dropping off the “F” list entirely. Report data suggests that pandemic-related changes in activity patterns in 2020 and 2021, such as increased telework, made a sizeable difference in ozone levels. With transportation-related emissions having long been reported as one of the biggest contributors to air pollution, this reinforces the importance of people understanding the way they choose to travel significantly impacts air quality in the region.

Fuchs notes that actions like combining errands into a single trip, walking or biking for short trips instead of hopping in your car, not topping off your gas tank, avoiding vehicle idling or opting for electric vehicles can greatly affect the amount of ozone-forming emissions on any given day and help people across the region breathe easier. On the heels of last year’s successful “Don’t Pollute. Switch Up Your Commute.” campaign launched by the Clean Air Partnership and more than half a dozen partners, area residents can still visit [www.SwitchUpYourCommute.com](http://www.SwitchUpYourCommute.com) to learn more about ways to modify their commuting behaviors and all the transportation options available on both sides of the Mississippi River – and links to associated schedules, pricing, programs, ride matching services, incentives and more.

Area residents are also encouraged to visit the Clean Air Partnership’s website at [www.CleanAir-StLouis.com](http://www.CleanAir-StLouis.com), where they can view a wealth of information on the health effects of poor air quality, tips for individuals to do their share for cleaner air and contact the Clean Air Partnership with interest in receiving their monthly newsletter. While on the site, individuals can also sign up to receive the daily forecast in their email inboxes via the Environmental Protection Agency’s EnviroFlash air quality alert system, which states if the forecast for the following day is a GREEN (good), YELLOW (moderate), ORANGE (unhealthy for sensitive groups) or RED (unhealthy) air quality day.

Additional air quality information and the daily forecast can be accessed by liking the Clean Air Partnership on Facebook, or by following the organization on Twitter @gatewaycleanair. To access the full American Lung Association 2023 “State of the Air” report, visit [www.Lung.org](http://www.Lung.org).

*# # #*

***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, which has a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator and is a Platinum-Level GuideStar Member, or to support the work it does, call 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872) or visit:*[*Lung.org.*](http://lung.org/)

***About the Clean Air Partnership***

*The Clean Air Partnership was formed in 1995, led by the American Lung Association, St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association, East-West Gateway Council of Governments, Washington University, and others, to increase awareness of regional air quality issues and to encourage activities to reduce air pollution emissions.*