



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

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Louisiana gets good, bad marks in air-quality report

BATON ROUGE – Louisiana showed continued improvement in air quality in the American Lung Association’s annual State of the Air Report which was released on Thursday. Although Baton Rouge is listed as the No. 10 most polluted city in America for ozone, Louisiana only had four parishes that scored Fs, according to the Lung Association’s grading scale. In 2003 there were 10 parishes.

Baton Rouge made the nationwide top-10 list, but only had 24 orange days (unhealthy for sensitive people), six red days (unhealthy for all people) and zero purple days (very unhealthy for all) during 2002-2004. By comparison, Harris County, Texas, the closest county to Baton Rouge in the top 10 list, had 74 orange days, 20 red days and 2 purple days during this same three-year period. Harris County, which includes Houston, was ranked No. 4 on the list. Louisiana’s four failing parishes were East Baton Rouge, West Baton Rouge, Pointe Coupee and Iberville.

Alexandria made the Lung Association’s list of 23 cleanest cities in the nation for the air pollutant particulate matter 2.5, or PM2.5. The entire state of Louisiana is in compliance with the federal PM2.5 standard and all parishes received passing grades from the State of the Air report.

The Lung Association also has a chart on its website that shows the ozone trend for the Baton Rouge area. The chart shows significant improvement from the mid-1990s to 2002-2004.

“We agree with the trend data in this report,” said DEQ Assistant Secretary Lou Buatt. “East Baton Rouge and some of the nearby parishes are part of the five-parish non-attainment area as designated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and that’s because some of the monitors in that statistical area periodically go over the standard. However, we can see ozone pollution and air pollution in general, getting better throughout the state.”

Buatt is spearheading a statewide ozone steering committee to address ozone issues throughout Louisiana. The approach will help local communities take necessary steps to mitigate ozone formation in their areas. DEQ is also establishing ozone action days and ozone alerts throughout the state.

The Lung Association report focused on two criteria pollutants: PM2.5 and ozone. Ozone is a reactive form of oxygen that is caused when pollutants mix on hot, sunny days. PM2.5 comes from solid and liquid particles suspended in the air. Both pollutants can cause lung irritation.

The Lung Association calculates its grades differently than EPA, with respect to whether an area is in attainment for the federal air-quality standards. The Lung Association uses a weighted average of all the eight-hour daily averages that exceed the ozone standard. So, if one monitor goes over the 84 parts per million standard, then the entire parish is considered unhealthy for that day.