

## **Op-Ed (Published by The Daily Breeze): What's the air quality in SoCal Really Like?**

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Angelenos as of late have been thinking to themselves: why was this winter season so cold? As the recent Superbloom has shown, Los Angeles has been blessed with lots of rain. In fact, since October of last year, Los Angeles received 18 inches of rain. To put this in perspective, the city on average, sees about 14 inches of rain in a full year. This surge of rain has come with cooler days, a longer winter and beautiful views of snowcapped mountains.

The recent string of showers, foliage and clear skies can give the impression that our air is clean. However, despite the tremendous progress we have made over the years, our work is not finished. Tomorrow, the American Lung Association (ALA) will release its annual State of the Air Report that grades counties in the United States based on air pollution levels, specifically ozone (smog) and fine particulate matter. Los Angeles will again be high on that list. Although the report shows that Los Angeles continues to be one of the most polluted areas in the country, what it doesn't show is how in the past three decades, the number of days each year that failed to meet current federal clean air standards have decreased by more than 115 days.

There is no doubt that the 17 million residents within the South Coast Air Quality Management District (South Coast AQMD), which includes Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino and Orange counties, are exposed to high levels of ozone and particulate matter--80% of which comes from mobile sources.

Mobile sources, including the hundreds of thousands of trucks and diesel-powered equipment, compounded with unique weather conditions in the Southland, contribute most to the smog problem. Exposure to traffic-related air pollution has been linked to a variety of short-term and long-term health problems, including worsened asthma symptoms, reduced lung growth in children, and worsened heart conditions in adults.

South Coast AQMD is working diligently to tackle these issues. We are implementing community-based partnerships through Assembly Bill 617 to reduce air pollution in environmental justice communities including the Wilmington/Carson/West Long Beach, East Los Angeles/Boyle Heights/West Commerce, and San Bernardino/Muscoy areas. This is a collaborative effort with community members where we have engaged residents, community organizations, businesses and other agencies to identify and address air pollution problems within their neighborhoods.

For stationary sources, we already have the strictest air pollution regulations in the entire country, and continue to strengthen our regulations on refineries, power plants and other industrial sources. For mobile sources, we push clean air technology development and engage fleet owners to replace dirty trucks with cleaner trucks. In the past 20 years we have accelerated the transition to near-zero and zero emission transportation technologies and have provided almost \$1.2 billion to help businesses, local governments and colleges upgrade their fleets from gas- or diesel-powered engines to the cleanest technologies available, reducing a total of 477 tons of particulate matter and 15,295 tons of nitrogen oxide, a key contributor to smog.

To reduce localized exposure to emissions, we have installed air filtration systems at 81 schools near freeways or heavy truck traffic. We have dozens of regional monitors, inspectors to make sure facilities are complying with our rules and investigate local community complaints.

As a result, air quality in our basin has improved significantly. Ozone levels have fallen by more than three-quarters since peaks in the 1950s. Fine particulate matter levels have also decreased by more than 50% in the last 20 years.

Although the South Coast AQMD has implemented policies and strategies to reduce emissions, most don't realize that the changing climate plays a crucial role in air quality. Hotter temperatures, stagnant weather, and large wildfires throughout California have directly led to increases in high levels of ozone and fine particulate matter during certain parts of the year.

These changes in climate can make our efforts to meet upcoming deadlines to meet federal clean air standards more difficult. That is why it's so important to note that despite all the progress, the fight is becoming more challenging. We work hard every day to protect the health of the people we serve, but we need more support: support from local communities and industries to develop regulations to require even stricter controls on stationary sources; support for stricter regulations on mobile sources from federal and state agencies; and support for more incentive funding to deploy clean technology, build fueling infrastructure and replace more dirty heavy-duty vehicles and equipment. Stable funding would give our basin a chance at meeting federal standards, protect public health and significantly reduce greenhouse gases.

So I remind Angelenos, don't be distracted by the #superbloom images flooding your Instagram feeds. Now is the time to continue our efforts. Together we can achieve cleaner air and a healthier future.

*Wayne Nastri is the Executive Officer of the South Coast Air Quality Management District.*